

The Christology of the Anglo-Saxon Homilies

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To Tom, with love

Scio enim quod redemptor meus vivat

Job 19.25

DECLARATIONS

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

The dissertation does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes and references, but excluding the bibliography.

This dissertation is written in conformance with the ASNC style-sheet.

Naomi Ruth Bennett

12/12/12

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representations of Christ in the Old English homilies, by analysing as separate groups the homilies of Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the anonymous collections in the Blickling Homiliary and the Vercelli Book. The introduction outlines the background and contexts of the homilies, their significance, and previous work in the field. A definition of Christology is given for this context, as well as a brief examination of the Christology of other Old English texts.

The chapters of the thesis follow rough chronological order, beginning with the Blickling Homiliary. Although this homiliary is incomplete and its homilies are anonymous, one can gain some sense of the compiler's attitudes, and it is a valuable record of preaching at the time. The majority of the homilies are for penitential feasts, and due to this penitential purpose there is an emphasis on Christ's future role as Judge, rather than a personal relationship with Christ. Christ is a fairly abstracted and inactive figure, more divine than human, and his involvement in the world is often represented by intermediaries, such as the saints. Nonetheless the image of Christ is on the whole a gently compassionate one, with the homilists' overall goal being to encourage listeners to emulate Christ and his saints in order to be with them in Heaven. The collection's anonymity and early date suggests a more popular conception of Christ than some of the later, more deliberate collections.

The Vercelli Book, of which the content is also anonymous and roughly contemporary with the Blickling Book, exhibits perhaps the most uniform Christology of any of the Old English homily collections. Whereas the Blickling Homiliary follows the sequence of the Church's calendar, the compiler of the Vercelli Book made what is effectively a *florilegium* and thus had greater freedom to choose texts to fit his intended message for the collection as a whole. The Vercelli Book focuses heavily, though not exclusively, on penance and judgement, and Christ is most often portrayed as an enthroned judge, whilst the judgement itself rests less upon him than on an individual's actions and the petitioners' pleas. There is little emphasis on Christ's life, though the saints' actions reflect his teachings. The poetry of the Vercelli Book is also examined where relevant.

Ælfric's portrayal of Christ is both comprehensive and consistent. With a strong focus on scripture, Christ takes more of a predominant role. Augustine's heavy influence brings with it the notion of grace, which allows Ælfric to focus more on the Bible's positive messages, and less on eschatology. Ælfric depicts Christ particularly as Redeemer, significant both for individuals and humankind; his portrayal has the same gentleness as that of the Blickling Homiliary. The homilies follow the liturgical calendar, hence their wide scope. Ælfric's varied yet deliberate presentation of Christ exemplifies his broad theological aims and his use of a wide range of sources. His homilies aimed to evoke a response from his listeners, in penitential acts, praise of God, receiving the sacraments, and thus meriting salvation.

Wulfstan's relatively succinct corpus of homilies spends little time on the gospels, and emphasises far more the need to live a good Christian life, through education in prayer, the catechism and creed. God is usually the background authority figure, with the Antichrist often taking a more prominent and defined role than Christ. Even so, the legalistic and authoritative divinity can be associated with Christ, who must be appeased for fear of the end of the world and imminent judgement, and who also mirrors the earthly rulers with whom Wulfstan would have interacted on a regular basis.

In conclusion, I have found that the depiction of Christ is a telling reflection of the intents and styles of each homilist or collator. Whilst the anonymous homilies may show contradictions, the overall trajectory is coherent, and both Wulfstan and Ælfric exhibit consistent and deliberate Christologies, usually distinct from their theologies. The depiction of Christ is by no means uniform, but reflects both a wide range of sources and images, and the abilities of the respective homilists to adapt them to their own purposes, settings and audiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Declarations	ii
Abstract	iii
Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	xi
Chapter I: <i>Waldend and Wyrhta ealra Gesceafta</i> : Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Christology	2
Anglo-Saxon Christology	3
Overview	3
Bede's Christology	4
Previous work	7
Contribution of this thesis	11
Texts	12
Anonymous homilies	13
Sources	14
Patristic and Carolingian influence	14
Apocryphal texts and Irish influence	15
Biblical sources	15
Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England	16
Background	16
Old English homiletic literature	17
Production	18
Function	19
Teaching and delivery	20

Content	20
Summary	21
Chapter II: <i>Se Goldbloma</i> : The Blickling Homiliary	22
Introduction	22
Overview	22
Purpose	23
Eschatology	24
Manuscript history	25
Language	26
Influences	26
Scope	27
Christology	27
Saints' Lives	30
XIV. The Birth of John the Baptist (Sancte Iohannes Baptista Spel)	31
XV. The Passion of Peter and Paul (Spel be Petrus ond Paulus)	33
XVI. The Feast of St Michael the Archangel (To S. Michaeles Mæssan)	36
XVII. The Feast of St Martin (To Sancte Martines Mæssan)	38
XVIII. St Andrew (S. Andreas)	39
Summary	41
The Marian Homilies	41
I. Incarnation of the Lord (In Natali Domini)	42
XIII. Assumption of the Virgin Mary (S. Maria Mater Domini Nostri)	45
Summary	49
The Lenten Homilies	49
II Quinquagesima Sunday	50
III Dominica Prima in Quadragesima	53
IV Dominica Tertia in Quadragesima	56

V Dominica V in Quadragesima	58
VI Palm Sunday	59
Summary	63
The Rogationtide Homilies	63
VIII Rogation Monday	64
IX Rogation Tuesday	65
X Rogation Wednesday	66
Summary	68
From Easter to Pentecost	68
VII Dominica Pascha	68
XI Ascension Thursday	71
XII Pentecost Sunday	74
Summary	76
Conclusions	77
Chapter III: <i>Æfter his agenum gewyrhtum 7 geearnungum</i> : The Vercelli Book	78
Introduction	78
The Vercelli Manuscript	78
Selection and Organisation of Homilies	81
Christ in the Homilies	82
Vercelli Poetry	83
Eschatological Homilies	84
Introduction	84
II. De Die Iudicii	84
IV.	85
Soul and Body I	87
VIII.	88
IX.	89

X.	91
XV. Alia omelia de Die Iudicii	94
Summary	96
Exegetical/Liturgical Homilies	96
Introduction	96
I. De Parasceue	96
V and VI.	98
V. To Middanwintra. Ostende nobis Domine.	98
VI. Incipit narrare miracula	100
XVI. Omelia Epyffania Domini	101
XVII. De Purificatione Sancta[e] Maria[e]	104
Summary	105
Rogationtide Homilies	106
Introduction	106
XI. Spel to forman Gangdæge	106
XII. Spel to oðrum Gangdæge	107
XIII. Spel to þriddan Gangdæge	108
XIX, XX and XXI.	109
XIX.	109
XX.	111
Summary	113
Unspecified Homilies	113
Introduction	113
III.	114
VII.	115
XIV. Larspel to swylcere tide swa man wile.	116
XXII.	117

Homiletic Fragment I	118
Summary	118
Saints' Lives	119
Introduction	119
XVIII. De Sancto Martino Confessore	119
XXIII.	121
Hagiographic poetry	122
Andreas	123
Elene	125
Dream of the Rood	127
Summary	128
Conclusion	129
Chapter IV: <i>We gelyfon on ðone ancennedan Godes Sunu, Hælend Crist, þone ðe se Ælmihtiga Fæder for ure alysednysse asende</i> : The Homilies of Ælfric	130
Introduction	130
Ælfric	130
Homiletic texts	131
Audience	133
Style	134
Adaptation of sources	135
Ælfric's use of New Testament texts	138
Major topics	140
Theology	142
Ælfric's Christ	142
Ælfric's names for Christ	143
Christ's role in Salvation History	145
Creation, and Christ's two natures	147

Redemption	148
Judgement	152
Practical Applications	153
Christological typology in Ælfric's homilies: some examples	155
Conclusion	163
Chapter V: <i>Crist is eallra cristenra heafod</i> : The Homilies of Wulfstan	164
Introduction	164
Wulfstan's homilies	164
Wulfstan	164
Edition	165
Homiletic texts	166
Other writing	168
Style	169
Theology	171
Adaptation of sources	171
Penance	172
Christ	173
Structure	174
The Eschatological Homilies	175
Christ	176
Who is Antichrist?	176
Allowing Antichrist power	178
What Antichrist does	180
Summary	180
Catechetical homilies	181
Xa, Xb and Xc. Her ongynð be Cristendome, etc.	182
XI Incipit de visione Isaie Prophete quam vidit super Iudam et Hierusalem	183

XII. De falsis deis.	183
VI. Incipiunt sermones Lupi Episcopi.	184
VII and VIIa. De Fide Catholica.	185
VIIIa, VIIIb and VIIIc. Sermo de Baptismate, etc.	186
IX. De Septiformi Spiritu.	188
Summary	188
Archiepiscopal functions	188
XVIa and XVIb. Verba Ezechiel Prophete.	189
XV. Sermo de Cena Domini.	189
XVII. Lectio Secundam Lucam.	190
XVIII. De dedicatione ecclesiae.	191
XIV. Sermo in XL.	191
XIII. Sermo ad Populum.	192
Summary	192
Evil Days	193
XX. Sermo Lupi	193
XIX and XXI	195
Summary	196
Conclusion	196
Chapter VI: <i>Ordfruma and Ende</i> : Conclusion	197
Bibliography	201
Abbreviations	201
Primary texts and translations	201
Dictionaries, grammars and databases	203
Secondary texts	205

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All faults and errors, needless to say, remain my own.

Naomi Bennett

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CHAPTER I

WALDEND AND WYRHTA EALRA GESCEAFTA: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis presents an examination of the depictions and roles of Christ in Anglo-Saxon homiletic literature. My intention is to explore the range of ways in which he was represented, reflecting both the inherited traditions and the contemporary interests of the Anglo-Saxon authors, compilers and audience.

Christ is obviously an absolutely fundamental part of any medieval Christian culture. Nonetheless, no systematic analysis of the place of Christ in the Old English homilies has been undertaken, perhaps because his role is taken for granted. His place in the Old English homilies reflects not only the sources upon which the homilists were dependent, but also their own styles of teaching, the message they wished to impart, and their own cultural and historical setting. Christ is not always at the forefront in the homilies of the Anglo-Saxon church, but his implicit presence is always reflected in the narrative, exposition and exhortation. The lack of Christ's presence is also a telling feature in some cases. While some of these texts are virtually unique, others contain well established ideas, some of which are consistently repeated.

In order to gain a better understanding of Anglo-Saxon culture and literature it is essential to examine these representations of Christ, the most crucial character, as well as the preceding Christological depictions, perhaps even more so than to try to understand the literature in its pagan Germanic context. While it is certainly fair to say that the homilies are less original than the surviving Old English poetry, less impressively illustrated than the gospel books, and less historically significant than the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, their importance in the study of Anglo-Saxon England cannot be overestimated. Establishing contexts for the dissemination of these homilies is problematic, but their extensive circulation throughout England in the tenth and eleventh centuries – and reaching beyond both the Norman Conquest and the borders of

England – is indicative of their common usage and widespread influence, and the esteem with which they were regarded by compilers, and therefore preachers and their audiences. The homilies are probably the most representative texts of Christian doctrine imparted to both laity and clergy, and therefore depict more standard and popular conceptions of Christ.

Christology

In his classic introduction to systematic Christology, Gerald O’Collins gives the following summary definition of Christology:

In the light of Christian faith, practice, and worship, that branch of theology called Christology reflects systematically on the person, being, and activity of Jesus of Nazareth (c. 5BC – c. AD30). In seeking to clarify the essential truths about him, it investigates his person and being (who and what he was/is) and work (what he did/does).¹

Christology is a major field within *theology*, ‘the study or science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and the universe’,² within which are huge topics, encompassing such issues as Christ’s divinity and his role as Saviour. Major studies have been written on New Testament Christology, examining its origins and development, links to the Old Testament, and its varying branches.³ As with the study of any literature, whilst the basis of Christology may be a core set of texts from a certain period, in order to be studied they need to be examined within the context of the texts that preceded them. For instance, it is impossible to consider Christ as the Messiah without paying attention to the Old Testament prophecies he is thought to have fulfilled. Similarly, in order to explore early understandings of Christ’s divinity, it is necessary to examine both Greek and Jewish attitudes towards God and humanity. Paul was the first to explicitly conceive of Jesus as divine.⁴ Thanks also to Paul, we know that Jesus was known as ‘Christ’ within twenty years of his death and resurrection, and that the title, meaning ‘anointed’, ‘Messiah’, had lost most

¹ O’Collins, *Christology*, p. 1.

² *OED*, ‘theology’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/200388?redirectedFrom=theology#eid>

³ See further Moule, *Origin of Christology*, and O’Collins, *Christology*.

⁴ Moule, *Origin of Christology*, p. 106.

of its significance to become a personal name.⁵ The Apocalypse of St John also provided a wealth of Christological imagery, and the prophecies of, for example, Isaiah and Daniel, were crucial to the development of these later images.

Many complex Christological images were carried into the early medieval period, such as the Alpha and Omega, and Christ the enthroned king, whereas others, such as the Anchor, and even the Fish, seemingly went out of fashion when they could be replaced by less intentionally obscure symbols. The image of Christ is not, and never has been, a constant one. Throughout the development of Christianity, at diverse times and places different dimensions of Christ would be emphasised more than others. Certain qualities have become normalised, particularly that of a young to middle-aged man with shoulder length brown hair and a beard, not a particularly realistic view of a Jew living in first century Palestine. Nonetheless, Christ so depicted would be recognisable for most people today.

Anglo-Saxon Christology

Overview

The figure of Christ is at the forefront and background of nearly all of the literature of medieval Europe, and Anglo-Saxon England is no exception. Interest in Anglo-Saxon theology has been reviving in modern churches, as is evident in the works of Dales and Ward, both trying to connect their readers to Anglo-Saxon prayers and significant members of the church.⁶

According to Lees, just as history is idealised as heroic legend, in Christian writing ‘the past is rationalized according to the scheme of salvation history with its epic cycles of Fall and Redemption’.⁷ The Anglo-Saxons saw their migration to Britain as a re-enactment of the biblical exodus, particularly because of Bede’s interpretation of their past.⁸ Howe says ‘[t]he most influential aspect of Bede’s myth was its scheme for interpreting the great event of Anglo-Saxon pagan history in the terms of Christian historiography. By drawing on the story of the Israelites, Bede taught his people that they too had an Old Testament history

⁵ O’Collins, *Christology*, p. 24.

⁶ Dales, *Christ the Golden Blossom and Called to be Angels*; Ward, *Christ within Me and High King of Heaven*.

⁷ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 78.

⁸ Howe, *Migration and Myth-Making*, pp. 2, 5 and 6.

which was not to be spurned but rather to be viewed as preliminary to conversion'.⁹ Lees has also stressed the significance of Christ's role for the Anglo-Saxon Christians, saying that '[t]he ultimate pre-text for a saint's life, is of course, Christ's', and that '[s]acred narrative renders life coherent in terms of another life – Christ's – and another history – that of Scripture', with the life of Adam, the first man, fulfilled by the second man, Christ.¹⁰

Anglo-Saxon theology shows two major influences, the works of the Fathers coming from Rome with Augustine, and from Ireland, transmitted through Northumbria. While Gatch also contends that the theology of Wulfstan and Ælfric can be compared favourably with that of the Carolingians,¹¹ Fox has accurately described them as 'hardly devoted to issues of theological complexity',¹² with Wulfstan in particular more interested in his own agenda of morality than anything else. Bede, the last of the Church Fathers, and whether a transmitter of patristic theology or a theologian himself, relied on Gregory, ensuring his continued importance.¹³ Bede's theology was complex and in-depth, and he produced a good number of homilies, which had surprisingly little influence on these later ones in the vernacular, with the exception of Ælfric, who drew heavily on all the great patristic writers. Bede's exegesis was thorough, and better suited for his monastic audience than for the laity. Similarly, the difficulty of his Latin suited a learned environment.¹⁴ As an example of early Anglo-Saxon Christology, I will give a brief overview of Bede's approach to Christ the Redeemer.

Bede's Christology

Though he rarely quotes them directly in his homilies, Bede adheres closely to his patristic sources, particularly Augustine, Jerome and Gregory.¹⁵ Nonetheless, his own original thought still shines through, both in his ideas and in the way he puts them together.¹⁶ Besides the Gospel that is the starting point of each homily, Bede ranges widely through the Bible, with analogies drawn from various Old Testament books, as well as other Gospels and books of the New Testament. Redemption in Bede's mind is almost impossible to separate from the Exodus, and so the Passover. Accordingly, he frequently refers to Christ as the Paschal Lamb, whose sacrificial blood brings about redemption. Not surprisingly, most of his discussions

⁹ Howe, *Migration and Myth-Making*, p. 70.

¹⁰ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, pp. 30 and 47.

¹¹ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 6.

¹² Fox, *English Tradition*, p. 47.

¹³ Witalisz, 'The Blood I Souke', p. 74.

¹⁴ See Sharpe, 'Varieties of Bede's Prose'.

¹⁵ Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, p. xiii. Edition references from Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*.

¹⁶ Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, p. xvii.

about redemption occur in his homilies surrounding the feast of Easter, the time at which Christians recollect that Christ paid the price for our sins with his death and freed all humanity, past, present and future, from slavery to sin, death and Hell.

Redemption is a central element of Bede's theological thought. He uses *Redemptor*, or 'Redeemer' as a very common appellative for Christ in the *Homilies*, as frequently as the usually more common *Salvator*, or 'Saviour'. For example, in the Christmas Homily, Christ is referred to as both *Redemptor* and *Salvator* five times, not including quotations.¹⁷

Bede's treatment of redemption is specifically about a purchase being paid for, reflecting the literal meaning of the Latin word *redimo*, 'I buy back'. This is perhaps because he is writing in Latin so that his vocabulary can be more precise, rather than having to translate abstract concepts into the vernacular, as later Anglo-Saxon homilists did. He does not confuse redemption with the notion of salvation, although there is of course considerable overlap: Christ saves humanity through his redeeming love. Christ is the price paid, and performs the act of sacrifice himself as 'sacerdos uidelicet ut nos a peccatis hostia suae passionis emundet'.¹⁸

Another important aspect of redemption is the idea of liberation, which Bede closely intertwines with purchase. The precedent for Christ's redemption of humankind is Yahweh's freeing of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Here, they must pay a price for their redemption: before Yahweh brings the tenth plague to Egypt, killing the first born son of every family, he instructs Moses so that he can prevent this from happening to the Israelites. Each household must take a one-year-old male lamb, without any blemishes, and having killed it, smear their lintel with its blood. This is the sign by which the angel of death knows to pass over the house, leaving its inhabitants alive. Because of this last plague, Pharaoh allows the Israelites to leave, and in freedom they eventually make their way to the Promised Land. The sacrifice of the lamb is the sign, and the price, by which the Israelites are liberated, and Bede asserts that 'quae profecto redemptio populi illius spiritalis nostrae redemptionis...est typum'.¹⁹

¹⁷ I.6, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, pp. 37-45, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, pp. 52-64.

¹⁸ II.10, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 249, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, p. 92, 'a priest to cleanse us thoroughly from our sins by being a sacrificial offering in his passion'.

¹⁹ II.7, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 230, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, p. 65, '[t]he redemption of that people unquestionably bore within it a type of our spiritual redemption'. Story of the Passover from Ex. 12.3-50.

Christ's blood and life is the price paid for the redemption of humankind. He takes on the role of the pure, unblemished male lamb of the Passover, to which Bede makes frequent reference. Bede draws close parallels between the two: immediately after he recounts the Passover, he explains the typology, saying 'veniens agnus immaculatus dignatus est immolari pro nobis dedit sanguinem suum nostrae salutis pretium'.²⁰ He claims that the blood of the lamb would have been spread in the shape of a cross over the lintel,²¹ and frequently calls Christ the Lamb of God, and explains why John the Baptist uses this term: 'praecursor suus agnum Dei uocauerit; quia uidelicet eum prae ceteris mortalibus singulariter innocentum, hoc est ab omni peccato mundum nouit quia nos suo sanguine redempturum quia dona sui uelleris sponte largiturum ex quo uestem nobis nuptialem facere possimus'.²² He also explains Christ's passivity and silence in the face of death by quoting Isaiah, 'Sicut ouis ad occisionem ducitur et sicut agnus coram tondente se sine uoce sic obmutescit'.²³ The major difference between the two situations is that at the Passover the lamb the Israelites have bought is paying the price for their redemption with its life, whereas Christ pays for the redemption of humanity on his own account, though he is despised and his payment is not valued. Bede even continues the analogy into the forty years in the desert, saying that humankind also cannot gain Paradise / the Promised Land immediately after they have received their redemption: 'nimirum populus fidelium non statim post baptisma caelestis patriae potest gaudia subire'.²⁴ The imagery of Christ as the *Agnus Dei* is still prominent at the time of Wulfstan and Ælfric, evidenced by Æthelred's penitential *Agnus Dei* coinage, though it is never used in Wulfstan's homilies.²⁵

Bede claims that Christ intentionally came to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to make it clear that he was the stainless lamb who would take away the sin of the world. According to tradition, he says, the Paschal lamb should be selected five days before the

²⁰ II.7, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 230, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, pp. 65-6, 'the unspotted Lamb came and deigned to be immolated for us; he gave his blood as the price of our salvation'.

²¹ II.5, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 215, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, p. 44, 'iste sanguine... in crucis modum medio limine et superliminari mediis asperso in postibus'.

²² I.16, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 110, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, p. 156, 'his precursor called Jesus the Lamb of God, namely because he knew that [Jesus] was singularly innocent, beyond other mortals clean, that is, from every sin; because he foresaw that [Jesus] was going to redeem us in his own blood; because of his own volition he was going to lavish [upon us] the gift of his wool, from which we can make for ourselves a wedding garment'.

²³ I.16, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 112, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, p. 157, 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb he became silent before his shearers and opened not his mouth'; also II.3, ed. p. 201, trans. p. 24. Quoting from Is. 53.7.

²⁴ I.1, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 3, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, p. 3, 'Surely the faithful cannot pass immediately after baptism to the joys of the Heavenly fatherland'.

²⁵ Keynes, 'An Abbot', p. 190.

Passover, and of course Christ was acclaimed on Palm Sunday by the people of Jerusalem, five days before the Passover when he was taken in captivity and condemned to death.²⁶ Christ is both king and high priest, as well as sacrifice.²⁷ God the Father offers his son, and therefore himself, in sacrifice, and it is he who oversees the sacrifice and accepts it as worthy. Of course, the death of Christ is not the end of the story, as it was for the lambs of the first Passover. Christ conquered by his willing death both physical and spiritual death forever.²⁸ Christ ‘subuertit potentiam diaboli... electos qui ibidem quamuis tranquillitatis sinu tenebantur eruit et hac ipsa nocte resurgens a mortuis ad caelestis regni gaudia perduxit’.²⁹ He is the Paschal lamb that redeemed us, and by his resurrection showed the hope of life and everlasting liberty.

Bede’s writing on redemption is richly based in Scripture. His constant representation of Christ as the sacrificial lamb is very striking, and he makes clear just what his notion of redemption is: a price being paid in order to bring about salvation. This links Christ with the lamb that was slaughtered and triumphant in the Book of Revelation, and has long been one of the most common depictions of Christ in artwork. Though the *Agnus Dei* was very important to Bede in his homilies, it barely appears in the later Old English homilies. Instead, he is usually human in appearance, but often beyond space or time in his divine role.

Previous work

Whilst a number of studies of individual homilies have been completed, Christ’s role across them has never been looked at comprehensively. I am restricting this analysis to homilies in the hope that it may help to build up a more comprehensive picture of Christ in an Anglo-Saxon setting. The homilies themselves give more than enough material to work with, but I hope that in the future Christ’s role in Anglo-Saxon laws, charters and other texts may also be

²⁶ II.3, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 201, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, p. 24, ‘Ergo dominus instar agni pachalis ante quinque dies quam pati inciperet locum passionis adiit ut se insinueret esse illum de quo praedixit Esaias’.

²⁷ I.3, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, pp. 19-20, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, I, pp. 26-7, ‘in humanitate adsumpta utramque habiturus erat personam et sacerdotis scilicet et regis... hostiam carnis suae offerre dignatus est’.

²⁸ II.10, ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 250, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, pp. 93-4, ‘Christus Iesus suscepit unam misericorditer et iuste utramque damnauit’.

²⁹ II.7 ed. Hurst, *Homiliarvm Evangelii*, p. 231, trans. Martin and Hurst, *Homilies on the Gospels*, II, pp. 66-7, ‘overthrows the might of the devil...rescued those of his elect who were held there (albeit in a state of repose), and, by rising from the dead on this very night, brought them to the joys of the Heavenly Kingdom’.

drawn into this framework. I hope to give textual basis to ideas that have been previously taken for granted, and draw together new ideas to explore just how complex the image of Christ actually was.

The role of Christ has long since been the subject of study.³⁰ Christ is a principal character in a number of Old English poems, including *Christ I, II* and *III*, *Christ and Satan*, and *Dream of the Rood*. He is important on a number of levels: a character in the narrative, the principle at the basis of the actions of others, and the final destination in a cosmic sense. Garde has claimed that all of the surviving codices show an identical understanding of salvation history and Christian redemption.³¹ The poetry, especially the *Christ* poems, emphasises redemption, using the liturgy as a way of accessing the events of Christ's life.³² He is variously portrayed as Light in the darkness; eternal; the Word made flesh; Son of God and Son of Man; Emmanuel; Saviour; Christ; Creator; he is the Wisdom of God through whom all was created. He is shown in Judgement and given heroic titles.³³ Witalisz has said that 'medieval christocentricity developed a special, affective interest in and devotion to the humanity of Christ, most emphatically represented in scenes of the Crucifixion.'³⁴ While this mostly happened later in the medieval period, a cult of the Cross in Northumbria is evidenced by *Dream of the Rood*.³⁵ As Witalisz observes, '[a]ffective christocentric piety should be seen as one of the ways in which individuals of a particular psychological and emotional nature respond to the message of the Crucifixion, ever central in the ever incarnational Christian faith'.³⁶ A catechetical perception of salvation history is common to the whole Old English religious collection of poetry, with the intention mostly eschatological, the poetic function didactic, and patristic sermon literature offering insight into the texts.³⁷ The Christ-centred poems reflect aspects of the Incarnation, with the theology of atonement in the context of salvation history.³⁸ Garde argues that Old English religious poetry is full of assumptions about Christ's redemption,³⁹ and so it is with the Old English homilies. Despite being 'prosaic', however, they do not necessarily spell it out at all more clearly.

³⁰ For example, Hall, 'Old English Epic of Redemption', and 'Twenty Year Perspective'.

³¹ Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 1.

³² Raw, 'New Testament', p. 228.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 236-7.

³⁴ Witalisz, 'The Blood I Souke', p. 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁷ Garde and Muir, 'Patristic Influence', p. 64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁹ Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 7.

There is now in print a detailed study of Christ's place in what is sweepingly known as 'Celtic Christianity', up to the tenth century.⁴⁰ Herren and Brown suggest that the writings of Pelagius were influential and responsible for a perceived difference between the Christianity of Britain and Ireland and that of the Continent. The penitential aspect of Christ's role received the most attention in this period.⁴¹ Christ as Judge was a particularly prominent image, as well as Christ the Perfect Monk.⁴² Pelagius's doctrine of freewill led to an emphasis on Christ's humanity rather than his divinity.⁴³ While none of the images of Christ originated in the Insular world, some were adapted into unusual forms.⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, Irish Christianity was influential for Northumbria in particular in the early centuries, so this book is helpful for background on the less 'orthodox' Roman perspective.

Of course, writing is only one way of recording and exploring beliefs. Christ is present in Anglo-Saxon culture well beyond the words of the homilies, poems and bibles where he is most evident. Barbara Raw has examined in detail the art which depicts Christ crucified, and images of the Trinity. According to Raw, the '[s]tudy of Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion pictures suggests... that the major function of much religious art was to provide a focus for meditation and that, far from explaining Christian belief in simple terms, it reflected many of the most subtle and precocious ideas of the time.'⁴⁵ She has said that the 'belief in the presence of Christ, everywhere and to all, is reflected in the preference shown in Anglo-Saxon gospelbooks for pictures of the risen and ascended Christ rather than representations of gospel events in which his presence was limited by time and space. These pictures, which portray him in a timeless existence, free of the material items which might tie the figure to this world, invite those studying them to pass beyond the image and to establish a relationship with the reality beyond'.⁴⁶ She has also argued that Christ's appearance in art is more than a portrait; different representations attempt to grasp complexities, reflecting different views and determining our conception of him. Changing symbols of divinity reflect the human inadequacy of facing the mystery.⁴⁷ Raw helpfully summarises the crucifixion art of the period:

⁴⁰ Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, p. x.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Raw, *Crucifixion*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Raw, *Trinity*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, chh. 6 and 7.

First, his death is not seen as an end in itself: what matters is Christ's passover from death to life. Secondly, there is an emphasis on Christ's two natures: he is presented as God and king, creator of the world and victor over the devil and at the same time as the son of Mary, suffering and dying on the cross. Third, his death is seen within the context of redemption history: it is a recapitulation of God's original creation, a reversal of man's fall. Fourth, the death of Christ is closely linked to the sacraments of the church. Throughout, there is an emphasis on Christ's death as something which belongs to the present rather than to the past and it is this which prompts a response from man, whether in the form of good works or of love and gratitude.⁴⁸

While her analyses include illustrations in manuscripts, her primarily artistic focus has meant that the literary content of the manuscripts has been largely glossed over.

Jolly, Keefer and Karkov have recently edited a series of books regarding the role of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon culture. This includes not only physical objects for devotion and illustration but also a range of liturgical rituals, such as signing with the cross. The cross was a powerful talisman,⁴⁹ typologically drawing together the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁰ It was a universal symbol, able to be replicated in many forms and accessible to all layers of society,⁵¹ similar to the way Christ became a talisman in Rogationtide. It is within this context that these homilies were produced, and it is important to always bear in mind just how ingrained the understanding of Christ would have been, and how the homilies would either build up or redirect this faith. Karkov describes the illustrations of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11⁵² as being compiled to a plan to illustrate the Fall and Redemption.⁵³ In discussing intercession, she also notes the illustration of the Donor page of the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, where Christ is flanked by Mary and Peter.⁵⁴ Deshman has placed the use of Anglo-Saxon crucifixion iconography to evoke the real presence of Christ within the context of Christian Palestine,⁵⁵ again noting Carolingian influence.⁵⁶ Ó'Carragáin has comprehensively surveyed specific crosses from the perspective of *Dream of the Rood*.⁵⁷

⁴⁸ Raw, *Crucifixion*, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Jolly, 'Cross-referencing', p. 220.

⁵⁰ Karkov, 'Sign of the Cross', p. 260.

⁵¹ Karkov et al., *Place of the Cross*, p. xiii.

⁵² Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11 hereafter abbreviated to Junius 11.

⁵³ Karkov, 'Text and Picture', p. 2.

⁵⁴ Karkov, 'Judgement and Salvation', p. 162.

⁵⁵ Deshman, 'So What's New?', p. 9.

⁵⁶ Deshman, 'Art after Alfred', p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ó'Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*.

Yet, Christ crucified, while very important, is by no means his only depiction in the writing of Anglo-Saxon England and it might be expected that this would also be reflected in the material and social culture. Deshman has looked at the way aspects of Christ are able to be depicted, such as his divinity and humanity being suggested by only his feet showing in pictures of the Ascension.⁵⁸ He has also pointed out the assimilation of kings with Christ in the art of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, particularly in terms of enthronement, suggesting that the Anglo-Saxons took their monastic christological kingship from Ireland and from Carolingian precedents.⁵⁹ The royal iconography of the crowned Christ and the crowned magi were used both in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon art, moving the focus from *Christus Victor* to *Christus Rex*.⁶⁰

This literary and artistic background helps to set the stage for the environment within which the homilies were produced. As Lees has said, Old English prose has traditionally been seen as a stepping stone or backdrop to Old English poetry.⁶¹ However, while some of the homilies have been looked at in passing by the studies mentioned above, nobody has yet examined their Christology, or even their theology, as a collective unit, so I hope that this thesis will help to reverse the trend.

Contribution of this thesis

As these homilies are literary texts, with significance beyond the doctrine they impart, I am not regarding Christology particularly from a theological point of view, but as a starting point in my literary criticism. Christ as a character and a philosophy is at least as important for some of the homilists as he is as a representation of God. These homilies not only explore concepts, as do the letters of Paul, but they engage in narrative, as in the stories of the gospels and many Old Testament books. Christ is at different times both highly individualised, and a stylised figure. Each homiletic collection exhibits only a part of the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the nature and role of Christ, and while, placed alongside each other, they are still fragmentary and at times contradictory, by examining all of the homilies together it is possible to create a kaleidoscopic image of who Christ was to the Anglo-Saxons.

⁵⁸ Deshman, 'Disappearing Christ', pp. 242 and 262.

⁵⁹ Deshman, '*Benedictus Monarcha*', pp. 106, 108, 124 and 128.

⁶⁰ Deshman, '*Christus Rex*', pp. 137 and 146.

⁶¹ Lees, 'Patristic Sources', p. 157.

My primary method in this thesis has been to work through the homilies individually, bearing in mind their context in terms of author and purpose, and to examine Christ's role and function in the narrative, background and structure of the homilies. I have at times looked specifically at lexicography and the terms used for Christ, but this is only of limited help, since some terms, such as *Dryhten* in the case of Wulfstan, and *Hælend* for Ælfric, are the default titles given to denote Christ, and so their semantic interpretation risks reading too much into a proper name. Nonetheless it is interesting to see the wide range of referents with which Christ is identified, particularly by Ælfric. Challenges I have encountered range from gaps in manuscripts, different versions of the same homily, the differences between composer, compiler, and scribe, and the big question of just who were the audiences of the homilies. Since virtually all of the homilies are derivative in some way, it is difficult to say what specifically reflects the thought of an Anglo-Saxon preacher and how much he 'owned' what is sometimes simply translation of a previously-existing Latin text. Even when the sources have been identified, the fact that they have been seen as worth translating, for whatever reason, links them specifically with their new Anglo-Saxon audience and gives them significance within this setting. Anglo-Saxon depictions of Christ need to be examined within their precedent context, that is the Bible and the writings of the Fathers, as well as within their literary context, particularly other writings in Old English, and in their historical setting. Naturally, everything that can be garnered about the authors and compilers of these homilies is also of high significance. In many ways, the fact that so much is derivative makes the homilies far more interesting than if they only gave evidence of one orthodox Anglo-Saxon Christology. While Ælfric may have found earlier homilies heretical and distasteful, their popularity, and their transmission history, reaching well beyond his own time, show that they had a wide appeal and that their inherent contradictions could be borne – whether noticed or not – by their audience.

Texts

In establishing the scope of this thesis, I have tried to present a coherent and comparable selection of texts. These homilies were composed in order to disseminate the Christian faith, and to strengthen already-held convictions. There is a surviving corpus of twelve hundred Anglo-Saxon homilies or homiletic fragments spread over eighty-five manuscripts, not

including *vitae*.⁶² They are nearly all in Old English, and Hall has claimed it is unlikely there would have been much Latin preaching to the laity in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁶³ Most Latin sermons in English manuscripts would be for communal reading at the Night Office.⁶⁴ The groupings I have chosen are the anonymous homilies which make up the Blickling Book, those which are compiled alongside several poetic texts in the Vercelli Codex, the homilies of Archbishop Wulfstan, and the Catholic Homilies of Ælfric, as well as those in his *temporale* collection edited by John Pope. While it would have been quite reasonable to focus just on one or two of these collections, the four groupings lay a good foundation for a comparison between relatively early, anonymous homilies and the later, authored texts, as well as the distinctive split between moralistic exhortative sermons, and doctrinal homilies based on exegesis and the seasons of the church. Hill argues that the binary divide between the homilies with known authors – Ælfric and Wulfstan – compared to those that are anonymous, has led to value judgements and imbalance in scholarly activity.⁶⁵ This imbalance has improved in recent years but there is still a great disparity. I hope my greater focus on the anonymous homilies will help to rectify the discrepancy a little. The following chapters introduce the Blickling and Vercelli books at length, followed by the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan.

Anonymous homilies

With the intention of defining a distinct Christology, it may seem unhelpful to focus particularly on homilies regarding which the compositional intent, dating, locality, and often even influences are unknown. Nonetheless, even though authorial intent may be beyond our reach, the compilers display certain interests and tendencies, and follow some kind of plan, so I do believe that these homilies are best looked at in the context of their collections. While not trying to set out a comprehensive account of all matters theological and doctrinal as does Ælfric, the purpose of these collections is fundamental in the ways they do, or do not portray Christ. That which is left out of these collections is as significant as that which is included, though often harder to define, and certainly too uncertain to analyse with confidence. Due to the constraints of space and the limitations of what can be said without repetition, I have chosen to leave out texts that would ideally have been worth examining, including those

⁶² Tristram, *Early Insular Preaching*, p. 3.

⁶³ Hall, 'Latin Sermons and Lay Preaching', p. 150.

⁶⁴ Hall, 'Latin Sermons for Saints', p. 227.

⁶⁵ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 43.

which, according to Dalbey, have remained in ‘justly deserved critical oblivion’,⁶⁶ as well as the Rogationtide homilies edited by Bazire and Cross. Many of them overlap at least in part with those in these collections, and are often in compilations shared with Ælfrician and Wulfstanian homilies. To deal with these, analysis would need to be done more on the basis of manuscripts or individual homilies, which would be better suited to the study of the later transmission of Anglo-Saxon homilies.

Sources

Patristic and Carolingian influence

All the evidence suggests that across Anglo-Saxon England libraries had greatly varying numbers of books.⁶⁷ The Anglo-Saxon homilists exhibit awareness of a wide range of sources, though not all of this access would have been direct. A good many sources would have come through Carolingian homiliaries, and possibly earlier vernacular texts as well.⁶⁸ The influence of the Carolingians in Anglo-Saxon England was substantial, both regarding monastic reform and the many texts they produced.⁶⁹ Standard homiletic texts were transmitted through compilations like Paul the Deacon’s homiliary,⁷⁰ commissioned by Charlemagne, which was particularly important for Ælfric.⁷¹ Early medieval theology is conservative, known for its ‘ubiquity, antiquity, and universality’.⁷² The Anglo-Saxons seemed generally happy to transmit this, so much so that Ælfric claims that the purpose of his homilies is only translation. Major patristic authors such as Gregory, Jerome and Augustine are all represented in the homilies,⁷³ especially those of Ælfric, though the anonymous homilies often rely on texts misattributed to the Fathers.⁷⁴ One late patristic author to show a special influence was Isidore of Seville, as Di Sciacca has explored at length. His *Synonyma* were particularly popular, and a significant influence on the anonymous homilies in Isidore’s portrayal of God: ‘[f]ar from being a loving father, whose mercy inspires hope and confidence, God is portrayed as an awe-inspiring judge, constantly threatening eternal

⁶⁶ Dalbey, ‘Soul’s Medicine’, p. 470.

⁶⁷ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 57.

⁶⁸ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 122.

⁶⁹ Stafford, ‘Church and Society’, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Smetana, ‘Paul the Deacon’, p. 76.

⁷¹ Tristram, *Early Insular Preaching*, p. 6.

⁷² Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 4.

⁷³ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 122.

punishment, while Christ is almost absent'.⁷⁵ However, I believe that in the case of the Old English sermons, it is Christ who is seen as the judge, as there is often reference in some way to his passion and crucifixion.

Apocryphal texts and Irish influence

The patristic authors were not the only influence on the Old English homilies. Apocalyptic literature generally was popular. It was instructive, memorable, dramatic and accessible.⁷⁶ The Anglo-Saxon authors would recast the material from narrative into a hortatory voice.⁷⁷ Even Ælfric could be led astray if an apocalyptic text had been transmitted under the name of an author he trusted. Charles Wright has written extensively on Irish influences generally in Old English literature, and specific to a number of homilies, particularly anonymous ones. Wright argues that the texts of Irish origin did not leave a very great imprint on Old English literature, 'but where such influence can be traced, particularly among the anonymous homilies, it can be manifested in vivid and grotesque eschatological motifs and extravagant rhetorical formulations'.⁷⁸ Scholars have noted in Irish texts and authors a particular fondness for apocrypha and suspect, even heretical, literature.⁷⁹ These Irish traditions would have been assimilated by English authors trained in Irish schools, and by the exposure to Irish texts, especially as the Irish were responsible for the conversion of some parts of Anglo-Saxon England.⁸⁰ Wright notes further that '[o]nce an apocryphal or eschatological motif has entered the vernacular tradition, it could be transmitted and adapted without further direct reliance on Irish sources'.⁸¹ It is sometimes difficult to identify whether influences are Anglo-Saxon or Irish, so closely were they entwined.⁸² Major features of Irish influence include the enumerative style, which in private prayers often included the enumeration of the attributes of God and Christ, and the use of *Visio Pauli*,⁸³ both of which are prominent in the anonymous homilies.

Biblical sources

The stories of the Old Testament were considered risky to impart due to its acceptance of concubines and other 'immoral' behaviour, so they had to be reinterpreted through allegory.

⁷⁵ Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Healey, 'Apocryphal Gospel', p. 94.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁷⁸ Wright, *Irish Tradition*, p. 47.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 106 and 263.

This made it resonate with the New Testament, and become ‘safe’ for its audience.⁸⁴ However, this developed into a major source for typological imagery.⁸⁵ Whilst Old English poetic recountings of the Old Testament were generally narrative in form, this was not the case for New Testament poems, reflecting their purpose primarily as revelation and meditation rather than history.⁸⁶

As so much of the preaching material of the Anglo-Saxon church is adapted from earlier texts, its value as an insight into Anglo-Saxon ideas can be questioned. But, as Gatch has said, ‘derivative though it may be, any body of thought is unique by virtue of the historical moment in which it was produced and by which it was conditioned’.⁸⁷ Motifs were naturalised, and texts were adapted for the audience.⁸⁸ While the homilies were traditional in their outlook, they were new to Anglo-Saxon England.⁸⁹

Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England

Background

There is a traditional distinction between sermons and homilies, though as Hill argues, the modern definition of ‘homily’ as scripturally-based exegesis, and ‘sermon’ for other sorts of preaching, was not necessarily a distinction considered by medieval authors.⁹⁰ Homilies were often intended for the more educated monastic setting, whereas moralistic sermons were intended for the laity.⁹¹ The main function of homilies throughout the Middle Ages was for reading at the Night Office, particularly nocturns on Sundays and feast days.⁹² The Carolingians would have Old and New Testament readings in the first nocturn, a sermon in the second, and a homily in the third, though the last two may not have been so clear cut. Bede composed texts for each, from a variety of sources, but was later superseded by Paul the Deacon, who used entire patristic texts in his homiliary.⁹³ Gatch contends that preaching in the Mass was out of fashion in the Carolingian church.⁹⁴ Rather, it was usually done during

⁸⁴ Godden, ‘Old Testament’, p. 208.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Raw, ‘New Testament’, p. 227.

⁸⁷ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ Wright, *Homilies and Latin Sources*, pp. 24 and 41.

⁸⁹ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 19.

⁹⁰ Hill, ‘Reform and Resistance’, p. 19.

⁹¹ de Reu, ‘Divers Chemins’, p. 337.

⁹² Clayton, ‘Homiliaries and Preaching’, p. 152.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

⁹⁴ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 36.

Prone.⁹⁵ Sermons were usually presented orally within a liturgical or religious context, with an authoritative person instructing and exhorting the audience. They acted as a bridge between the learned clergy and the laity.⁹⁶ Sermons to be preached in the vernacular would generally have been written down in Latin.⁹⁷ Latin was the 'literate' language of early medieval Europe, with the literate laity small in number.⁹⁸ Controversially, Amos argues that the non-literate were unable to grasp abstract concepts, had no sense of the past, and were unable to move between the particular and the general.⁹⁹ However, he also contends that due to the influence of penitentials, nearly every sermon had some account of good works and Judgement.¹⁰⁰ Imagery was explained with concepts from daily life, with practical applications for the reader.¹⁰¹ De Reu argues that to place a sermon in context, one must study the sermon, the preacher, the audience, and the society in which the sermon was produced.¹⁰² Unfortunately, this is not always possible for Anglo-Saxon sermons, which are often anonymous, difficult to date, and without a clearly indicated audience.

Old English homiletic literature

Both sermons and homilies are present in Old English literature, though 'homily' is the encompassing term used for all preaching materials. There is a substantial body of vernacular homiletic literature from England from the tenth century, some of which is of a high quality.¹⁰³ In most countries of Europe few vernacular sermons were written down before 1200, which makes the Old English homilies particularly unique.¹⁰⁴ Lees points out that both prose and poetry contain homiletic work,¹⁰⁵ which is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the Vercelli Book. The rhetoric of the homilies indicates what each author thought was suitable for his community.¹⁰⁶ It has been argued that the Old English homiletic corpus represents two discontinuous traditions, divided between the apocryphal interests of the anonymous homilists and the style of Wulfstan and Ælfric, with both pairings interested in traditionalism and the dramatic moments in salvation history, but using different sources.¹⁰⁷ This pairing

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁶ Kienzle, 'Typology of the Medieval Sermon', p. 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁸ Amos, 'Early Medieval Sermons', p. 2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-2.

¹⁰² de Reu, 'Divers Chemins', p. 331.

¹⁰³ Millett, 'Change and Continuity', p. 222.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁵ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁶ Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 120.

strikes me as limited, acknowledging form and sources over the actual message of the homilies. The greater differences, as I will discuss further in the conclusion, are between the more judgemental approach of the Vercelli Book and Wulfstan, as opposed to the more balanced and liturgical approach of the Blickling Book and Ælfric.

While the compositions I have focused on were written in the late tenth and early eleventh century, Swan has stated that ‘Old English preaching, and the production of preaching texts, did not stop at 1066’, and that the homilies continued to be important in Anglo-Norman England.¹⁰⁸ The Norman conquest caused a major setback in the writing of new English sermons, and so many Old English homilies continued to be copied into the twelfth century, sometimes in combination with newer homilies.¹⁰⁹ Conti contends that despite the lack of new material, there was still a ‘sustained and profound interest in English works’, in the twelfth century.¹¹⁰ Anglo-Saxon vernacular preaching also travelled beyond England and influenced a similar development in Scandinavia.¹¹¹

Production

The homilies of the Anglo-Saxon church were produced in monastic settings, with access to libraries of some sort and educated monks able to both read and write English and Latin, though with mixed abilities. Foot has claimed that the creation of a library was considered as essential for Benedictine monasteries as agriculture,¹¹² while Stafford has called the monasteries ‘powerhouses of prayer in society’.¹¹³ These two aspects together make them the ideal place for the production of religious texts. The timeframe of these homilies lines up with the later stages of the Benedictine Reform, but where exactly the anonymous homilies fit into this context has been disputed. Lees believes that ‘[c]irculated, if not always composed, under the broad aegis of the Reform, Old English homilies are as much responses to this movement as they are features of it.’¹¹⁴ There are far more Old English homilies than Latin in this setting.¹¹⁵ This is highly significant, as Tristram has said:

[t]he novel feature in the Anglo-Saxon context was that the method was grafted onto the vernacular and that these homilies were not only *preached* in the vernacular but

¹⁰⁸ Swan, ‘Preaching Past the Conquest’, pp. 403 and 423.

¹⁰⁹ Millett, ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 226.

¹¹⁰ Conti, ‘Circulation of the Old English Homily’, p. 367.

¹¹¹ Abram, ‘Scandinavian Context’, p. 424.

¹¹² Foot, *Monastic Life*, p. 217.

¹¹³ Stafford, ‘Church and Society’, p. 19.

¹¹⁴ Lees, ‘Patristic Sources’, p. 174.

¹¹⁵ Tristram, *Early Insular Preaching*, p. 7.

also *written down* in the vernacular. The very fact that so many homilies in the vernacular were committed to writing, an expensive and time consuming affair, attests to the particular interest the monasteries took in using the vernacular for doctrinal, instructional, and political purposes.¹¹⁶

Gatch has contended that '[t]here is no evidence which allows one to suppose that preaching texts in the vernacular – whether homilies or sermons – were produced in any language in a volume comparable to that in Old English before the end of the eleventh century'.¹¹⁷ Loyn calls the tenth century a 'Golden Age' of Old English prose, and says that the homilies were not 'an instrument of original thought but rather... a practical means of disseminating religious, legal and social ideas necessary for the creation of a Christian community'.¹¹⁸ In the eleventh century, more attention was paid to the laity than ever before,¹¹⁹ extending the importance of the vernacular.

Function

It is difficult to say how the written homilies may have been utilised; they may have at times been used as notes for the creation of new sermons, but the nature of the homily was to be a performed, public activity,¹²⁰ and they would most often have been read aloud. Brown contends that '[h]omiletic literature was socially levelling', and that this would have had the most impact on the elite: '[t]he image of kings as Christ-like figures was potentially two-edged: it raised a standard by which kings might all the more be judged unfavourably'.¹²¹ Lees argues that when penance did not work against the Vikings, the homilies were intended to effect change, and are therefore primarily cultural, rather than historical, literary, or theological documents.¹²² This is mostly the case with Wulfstan, though the Rogationtide homilies also show a considerable amount about the culture of the Anglo-Saxon church. Pfaff lists the necessary books for liturgical use as the missal, epistles, hymn book, reading book, psalter, manual, penitential, and computus.¹²³ It is notable that no homiliary features on this list, whether because they were less essential than the other items, or because it would not have been common for a priest to own such a book.

¹¹⁶ Tristram, *Early Insular Preaching*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Gatch, 'Achievement of Ælfric', p. 60.

¹¹⁸ Loyn, *The English Church*, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Church and Society*, p. 21.

¹²⁰ Swan, 'Constructing Preacher and Audience', pp. 178-9.

¹²¹ Brown, *Church and Society*, pp. 26 and 28.

¹²² Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 9.

¹²³ Pfaff, *Liturgy in Medieval England*, p. 67.

Teaching and delivery

The pastoral letters of Ælfric and Wulfstan stress the importance of teaching people.¹²⁴ Wulfsgige, bishop of Sherburne, in the only direct statement in English about vernacular preaching, instructed at a period contemporary to the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan that mass-priests must explain the gospel in English to people, on Sundays and mass-days.¹²⁵ This shows an extension in the purposes of exegetical preaching from that depicted by Amos. The teaching done by the homilies was an important way of sharing the knowledge of the church fathers. Lees has said '[d]idacticism in the homilies is... a discipline guided by tradition-dependent knowledge of Scripture and aided by grace'.¹²⁶ In Lees's opinion, vernacular religious genres were worthless unless didactic.¹²⁷ As Treharne has noted, there would have been a discrepancy between the homilists' actual and imagined audiences.¹²⁸ Swan has argued that while the scripted voice of the preacher is more powerful than the audience, it would, nonetheless, be meaningless without somebody to listen.¹²⁹ Of course, the quality and effectiveness of the preaching could vary, whatever the text. Loyn has said '[i]t would be grotesque to think that the little parish priest would deliver his message in the polished prose of Ælfric or the ringing rhetoric of Wulfstan, but the homilies could provide the matter for a whole series of simple instructional talks'.¹³⁰ Tristram believes the flourishing in Old English homilies suggest pastoral addresses beyond the instructional, moral and devotional.¹³¹

Content

The homilies needed to be formulaic and draw on tradition while keeping up with contemporary ideals.¹³² Yet, as Lees has pointed out, 'Anglo-Saxon preaching is held to be utilitarian, nonliterary, by the critic, and is proved to be traditional by the student of patristics'.¹³³ As is evidenced throughout these homilies, there was a great interest in eschatology in the sources on which the homilists relied. Christ's role in this is significant, as Gatch has noted: '[f]or just as the ideal hero led his followers to actual or to moral victory, whatever the cost, so also Christ, the proper Lord of all mankind, led his faithful retainers to

¹²⁴ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 165.

¹²⁵ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 15.

¹²⁶ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 106.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹²⁸ Treharne, 'Life and Times', pp. 208-9.

¹²⁹ Swan, 'Constructing Preacher and Audience', pp. 178-9.

¹³⁰ Loyn, *The English Church*, p. 155.

¹³¹ Tristram, *Early Insular Preaching*, p. 10.

¹³² Swan, 'Constructing Preacher and Audience', p. 179.

¹³³ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 27.

the most decisive and inevitable of victories'.¹³⁴ The homilies range in interest from discussing the practices of the Anglo-Saxon church, to recounting the lives and deaths of the apostles in far lands, to posthumous discussions between the soul and body. The range of subjects is wide though with so many extant texts there is also a good deal of overlap in content.

Summary

The homilies of the Anglo-Saxon church are wide-ranging. Though we have limited information about their production and purpose, we can be confident that they were composed in order to influence and persuade their audiences to follow the beliefs that they propound. Christ is a crucial part of this, and though his role is not always explicit, this is sometimes when the homilists most reveal what they assume about him. Therefore, the homilies are both sources for what the authors intended their audiences to believe about Christ, and what they expected they would already know, thus revealing a good deal about the Christology of late Anglo-Saxon England.

¹³⁴ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 61.

CHAPTER II

SE GOLDBLOMA: THE BLICKLING HOMILIARY

Introduction

The Blickling Homiliary is contained in a late tenth-century manuscript containing an assortment of anonymous vernacular Anglo-Saxon preaching, with the addition of a fourteenth-century selection of Gospel passages and a fifteenth-century calendar.¹³⁵ The composition dates of the items within the homiliary have been disputed, ranging from before to after the Benedictine Reform, and the homilies have been judged by different critics as exemplary of each period.¹³⁶ Homily XIII, for the feast of the Ascension, attests the date of 971, which is thought to be a reasonable date for the copying, albeit not the composition, of the items in this collection.¹³⁷ The possibility of multiple authors over a period of time has been suggested,¹³⁸ and the manuscript is the work of two scribes.¹³⁹ Scragg describes it as ‘the second largest collection of anonymous homilies, which, despite the loss of five quires at the beginning and further material at the end, remains very significant in the study of the tenth-century tradition’.¹⁴⁰ Despite this recognised importance, critical writing on the Blickling Homilies has largely been limited to source study, linguistic analysis, and examination of the homilies’ later transmission, and there is as yet no entirely satisfactory edition of the homilies.¹⁴¹

Overview

The homilies are irregular, and sometimes even bordering on the nonsensical, not to the standard of Ælfric or Wulfstan either in prose style or in the coherence of content. However, as with any collection of preaching materials, choices have been made about which days are most in need of homilies, which sources to use, how different points should be emphasised, omitted, or otherwise adapted, and, in later transmissions of individual homilies from the Blickling Book, which texts are worth retaining. Clayton points out that while eight of the

¹³⁵ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. xxix.

¹³⁶ Chetwynd, ‘Nu Nellap’, p. 21.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Dalbey, ‘Hortatory Tone’, p. 641.

¹³⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. xxxvi.

¹⁴⁰ Scragg, ‘Corpus of Vernacular Homilies’, p. 233.

¹⁴¹ I am basing this thesis on Kelly’s most recent edition of the homilies, as despite its limitations it does take into account some of the scholarship achieved since Morris’s edition was published.

homilies in the Blickling Book are unique, ten occur elsewhere.¹⁴² Thompson has said that ‘[t]he person who put together the Blickling Book showed no commitment to regular public preaching; instead he wished to explain or enhance the observance of the holiest days of the year.’¹⁴³ In Ælfric’s preface to his first series of Catholic homilies, he speaks of the earlier heresies which he hopes his more correct homilies will replace, and which he implores scribes not to associate with his homilies or copy his homilies alongside.¹⁴⁴ As Swan has pointed out, this wish was ignored, because where Ælfric left gaps so as not to have to deal with apocryphal sources, or because he thought certain days were unsuitable for preaching, later compilers added homilies from non-Ælfrician and very suspect texts.¹⁴⁵ However, the very unorthodoxy of the Blickling Homilies does increase their chance of having a local flavour. Many of them are highly dependent upon apocryphal traditions, and somewhat influenced by materials from Ireland.¹⁴⁶ This is evidence that the popular church, not the reformed version Ælfric advocated, was influenced by and enjoyed some of the more exciting extra-biblical material that was available. Swan suggests that it is perhaps the named homilists, Wulfstan and Ælfric, who are the true anomalies within the greater tradition of the text being put before the authority.¹⁴⁷ Ælfric was influenced by texts such as the Blickling Homiliary in style; as Millett says ‘Ælfric’s concern for doctrinal purity and correctness is matched by the purity and correctness of his prose style; but his prose nevertheless reflects, in a more controlled way, the same range of stylistic influences as the work of his predecessors’.¹⁴⁸ However, he did express misgivings about the distribution of such material, fearing misinterpretation by the laity.¹⁴⁹

Purpose

The homilies of the Blickling Book are often classified with other anonymous Old English homiletic collections, such as the Vercelli Book, but as Scragg has pointed out, ‘the association is spurious’.¹⁵⁰ The two collections have a very different tone, despite some overlap in their contents, and similarity in their mysterious beginnings. Gatch says that ‘while the *Blickling Book* and the homilies of the *Vercelli Codex* represent the same general theological outlook, certain differences arise between the two because of their collectors’

¹⁴² Clayton, ‘Homiliaries and Preaching’, p. 167.

¹⁴³ Thompson, ‘De Festiuitatibus’, p. 116.

¹⁴⁴ Godden, *Catholic Homilies I*, Preface, pp. 174 and 177.

¹⁴⁵ Swan, ‘Corpus 198 and Blickling’, p. 89.

¹⁴⁶ Millett, ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 223.

¹⁴⁷ Swan, ‘Corpus 198 and Blickling’, p. 89.

¹⁴⁸ Millett, ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 224.

¹⁴⁹ Skeat, *Lives I*, Preface, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ Scragg, ‘Vercelli Homilies and Kent’, p. 379.

“variant purposes”. Both exemplify the traditional theological methodology of the age, relying on the Latin Fathers and teachers.¹⁵¹ What these purposes were cannot be definitively known, but while the Vercelli Book was probably intended for personal reading,¹⁵² the Blickling Book’s organisation suggests more liturgical usage. It is thought that the Blickling Book was originally intended as a *temporale* and *sanctorale*,¹⁵³ or possibly arranged as a response to the Carolingian *De Festivitatibus*, listing the most solemn occasions of the church’s year and urging the laity to attend Mass.¹⁵⁴ Dalbey claims that the homilies would have been heard by Sunday and feast day congregations, and the quality of lay preaching would depend upon the quality of the anonymous sermons.¹⁵⁵ Chetwynd argues that the simplicity of the exegesis shows that they were intended for a lay audience.¹⁵⁶ Millett points out that the Blickling homilies try to engage the audience on an emotional rather than intellectual level, with both rhetorical language and sensational content.¹⁵⁷ This has long led to the assumption that they were intended solely for a lay audience, but Gatch has questioned this, saying that there is no proof available to exclude clerics.¹⁵⁸ Despite a presumed knowledge of feasting customs and references to everyday life, Gatch does not think the homilists necessarily tailor their works for their readers.¹⁵⁹ Vernacular language is the most important indicator of audience, but Gatch does not believe the discourse was adjusted accordingly.¹⁶⁰ Swan argues that the Blickling Homilies are possibly from Worcester, which would present an interesting relationship to Winchester and the Benedictine reform. Unlike Ælfric’s homilies, she thinks the Blickling Book was intended solely to be heard, so the relationship between the undefined preacher and undefined audience is a central crux.¹⁶¹

Eschatology

Thematically, like the Vercelli Homilies, the Blickling Homilies are highly eschatological, and aim to drive their congregation to repentance and penance. The focus on Lent and the days of Rogation makes the penitential emphasis apparent even before one examines the content; however, other selections, such as the Harrowing of Hell for Easter Sunday, do particularly emphasise Christ’s role at the end of the world, and his fulfilment of the

¹⁵¹ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 117.

¹⁵² See Chapter III, ‘Introduction’.

¹⁵³ Toswell, ‘The Codicology of Anglo-Saxon Homiletic Manuscripts’, p. 215.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, ‘Carolingian *De Festivitatibus*’, p. 101.

¹⁵⁵ Dalbey, ‘Patterns of Preaching’, p. 478.

¹⁵⁶ Chetwynd, ‘Nu Nellap’, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Millett ‘Change and Continuity’, p. 223.

¹⁵⁸ Gatch, ‘Unknowable Audience’, pp. 108 and 115.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 115.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5.

¹⁶¹ Swan, ‘Constructing Preacher and Audience’, pp. 181-3.

prophecies. Gatch considers that ‘the *Blickling Book* can be described as an homiliary in which there is a lively but unspeculative and generally unorthodox interest in the Last Things’.¹⁶² Yet, whereas the Vercelli Homilies might be compared with Wulfstan’s in their focus on final things and a judging God, the Blickling Homilies are closer to Ælfric’s, with a redeeming Christ who ought to be appreciated. Whether composed by one or several authors, over a long or short period of time, the fact that they have been collected together in the tenth century, and the themes that link these homilies, justify their examination both as a unit, and as a collection of individual writings.

Manuscript history

The Blickling manuscript has a notable history. Scragg explores the physical makeup of the manuscript, and its overlap with other manuscripts.¹⁶³ It is an original collection, put together over a period of time. The scribes took care that it followed a pre-conceived design, the chronology of the church year.¹⁶⁴ Dalbey considers the manuscript evidence of the compiler’s desire ‘to complete a homiliary consistent at all times with his doctrinal beliefs and parenetic techniques.’¹⁶⁵ The quires and homilies are both divisible into three blocks. The first block seems to have been pieced together over a period of time, from several sources, whereas the other two blocks apparently had a deliberate order.¹⁶⁶ Individual items, rather than blocks of items, may have come from different sources.¹⁶⁷ Toswell does not think the collection is a coherent whole, but suggests, unlike Scragg, that homiletic manuscripts might be thought of as collections of booklets, which would have been more portable, and questions whether homiletic manuscripts should in fact be treated as a deliberate whole. Certainly as preserved the Blickling manuscript is not in the calendrical order, and the quiring and wear is uneven (a number of the pages of the manuscript are missing).¹⁶⁸ It may have been copied in a scriptorium in a small institution with a poorly stocked library, if any library at all, and only intermittent access to materials from outside.¹⁶⁹ The Blickling manuscript has a long history within the city of Lincoln, where it was used to record court proceedings.¹⁷⁰ It spent some time in Blickling Hall in Norfolk, and is now in the Scheide Library at Princeton.

¹⁶² Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 136.

¹⁶³ Scragg, ‘Blickling Manuscript’, p. 299.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁶⁵ Dalbey, ‘Hortatory Tone’, pp. 641-2.

¹⁶⁶ Scragg, ‘Blickling Manuscript’, pp. 303-4.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁶⁸ Toswell, ‘Codicology’, pp. 212, 219, 221, 226.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁰ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. xlv.

Editions

The Blickling Homilies were first edited and translated by Richard Morris for the Early English Text Society, with a comprehensive glossary, initially in 1874 in three parts, and by 1967 reprinted as a single volume. Morris claims in his introduction that they were not completely unknown up until this point, but it is not for some years after their publication that scholarly activity on the homilies started making progress.¹⁷¹ In 1960 a facsimile of the Blickling manuscript was edited by Rudolph Willard and published as volume 10 in *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*. This publication corrected the misbinding of the manuscript, and showed several misreadings and errors in Morris's edition, which nonetheless has continued to be the standard text. While further editions were begun and abandoned, it was not until 2003 that Richard Kelly's edition of the Blickling Homilies was published. Though it has been criticised for not making significant advances on Morris's edition, and its textual notes are disappointingly limited, Kelly does incorporate many of the corrections Willard's work proved necessary, and updates Morris's translation.¹⁷² Kelly has since published an accompanying concordance, surprisingly similar to Morris's glossary.

Language

Morris found the language of the Blickling Homilies old-fashioned.¹⁷³ Menner believes the homilies were composed in the Anglian dialect, a lot of which survives in West-Saxon transcriptions,¹⁷⁴ and Kelly argues for a West-Saxon scriptorium in the late tenth century.¹⁷⁵ He considers the language late West Saxon with some Anglian and Mercian features, coming from multiple authors and locations.¹⁷⁶ Features of syntax and vocabulary suggest a high dependence on Latin originals.¹⁷⁷ Millett highlights the 'eclectic and sometimes highly wrought style' of the language of both the Blickling and Vercelli Books, developed from Old English poetry, Latin, and Irish sources.¹⁷⁸

Influences

No homily can exist without precedents and influences. Indeed, even if it were possible, this would not fit well with the Christian understanding of faith passed down through the church, based on real events for which there were eyewitnesses. While the Blickling Homilies may be

¹⁷¹ Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, p. v.

¹⁷² See reviews by Gatch and Wilcox.

¹⁷³ Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, p. v.

¹⁷⁴ Menner, 'The Anglian Vocabulary', p. 64.

¹⁷⁵ Kelly, *Concordance*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4.

¹⁷⁷ Ogawa, 'Notes on Syntax', p. 86.

¹⁷⁸ Millett, 'Change and Continuity', p. 223.

considered unorthodox compared to later homilies, their reliance on apocryphal material is not out of line with the evidence of Old English poetry. To be sure they are far less focused on doctrine than Ælfric's homilies, but their intention is not to provide a comprehensive account of all aspects of (Roman) Christian orthodoxy, but to draw people closer to God and to call them to make up for their sins. As Chetwynd points out, 'The role of the homilists is not to initiate this education, but to encourage the audience to act upon it'.¹⁷⁹

Scope

The Blickling Homilies do not cover every Sunday or feast day of the Church year by any means, but the days for which there are sermons in this collection are presumably of special significance to their audience, with the lacuna covering Advent. Christmas Day, Palm Sunday, Easter Day, Ascension Thursday, Pentecost Sunday and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary are all major feasts in their own right. The feasts of John the Baptist and of Peter and Paul are also very significant as they are, along with Mary, the most important saints of the New Testament. The feasts of St Michael the Archangel, St Martin and St Andrew show more of a deliberate choice on the part of the compiler. St Martin holds a special place in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, and is the subject of *Catholic Homilies* II.34 as well as some anonymous texts.¹⁸⁰ A Feast for the Dedication of a church to St Michael is celebrated at *CH* I.34, and a feast for St Andrew at *CH* I.38, as well as in the Vercelli Book poem. The other two significant groups of homilies in the Blickling collection are for the Sundays of Lent, and the days of Rogation. These are both periods of penance and fasting, and it is noteworthy that they account for nearly half of the eighteen homilies in the collection.

Christology

Regarding Christ in the Blickling homilies, Dalbey argues that

Despite his assumption of our humanity, Christ remains throughout the homilies a divine, somewhat remote figure. He is the glorious leader whose strength, power and victory over the devil enable us better to fight the devil in our own lives. Even in the Palm Sunday homily, which tells of Christ dealing with Lazarus, with Mary and Martha, and with His disciples, Christ never becomes humanized. Gentle, stern and yet remote, He never seems to suffer or even to struggle, despite the malevolence of

¹⁷⁹ Chetwynd, 'Nu Nellaþ', p. 212.

¹⁸⁰ *Catholic Homilies* hereafter abbreviated to *CH*.

both the devil and evil men. The vision of Christ returning as Judge to send men to Hell or Heaven is constantly in the background.¹⁸¹

I believe Dalbey's points here are consistent with the Blickling homiliary as a whole, although sometimes Judgement is more in the foreground and Christ's goodness implied through the homilist's tone. According to Aronstam,

The Christology of the Blickling homilies is simple and orthodox. Although the soteriological mechanism is not clearly defined, Christ is seen as man's means to salvation, present in the world through baptism, faith and pre-eminently through the sacrament of the altar. There is nothing like a fully worked out sacramental theology in the homilies. The Eucharist is presented as a duty which can at times impart miraculous cures for illness to a communicant, but there is no attempt to explain the efficacy of the sacrament, as Ælfric was later inclined to do. Christ provided in his life the most perfect model for human conduct, and is acknowledged as creator of the world. Except in the Easter sermon, however, he is more often the background than the subject of the homilies, and the Easter sermon, though starting with the Passion and Resurrection, is almost totally eschatological, looking forward to the Second Coming and Doomsday. The final lesson of Easter, therefore, returns to the familiar theme or [sic] repentance [sic] and the effort to become worthy of divine mercy. The soteriological function of Christ is subordinated to the exemplary, not because the latter is more important, but because it requires a more definite human response.¹⁸²

Aronstam's comments are perceptive, but leave space for some deeper analysis of Christ's role and characteristics. Even as an exemplary figure, Christ's role is notable, and the examples given are at the discretion of the homilist or compiler. While relatively few of the homilies discuss Christ in particular, he is present in all of the homilies in some way. The God of the Old Testament is perhaps even more in the background than is Christ, and the Holy Spirit, while mentioned a few times, is again less significant. This is notable, as it draws attention to the function of Christ in the New Testament, and in the church for which the homilies are written. The Holy Spirit is reflected on at times as a background influence in the same way that Christ is. Christ takes a role as a character in the narratives, however, in a way that would be difficult for the Holy Spirit. He is easier to identify with and make relevant, if

¹⁸¹ Dalbey, 'Themes and Techniques', p. 237.

¹⁸² Aronstam, 'Popular Anglo-Saxon Belief', p. 276.

not perhaps to oneself, then in relation to others, such as a king or a priest. One of the most striking things about the depiction of Christ in these homilies is the oft-repeated fact that by becoming human, Christ did not lose any of his divinity, and was always still in Heaven. This responds to old heresies and uncertainties about Christ's dual nature, clarified at the First Council of Nicaea, as in the Nicene Creed. Perhaps it is because of this emphasis on his Godliness that he is not presented as warm or accessible; after all, he is only portrayed positively, just in a distant manner.

As a result of their anonymity, the Blickling Homilies are not attached to a particular person, place, or an exact timeframe, as in the case of Wulfstan or Ælfric's writing, and can be seen therefore as more representative of the general state of preaching in Anglo-Saxon England. Naturally, this needs to be taken with a good deal of caution, as whether the collection has one or several authors, we should be wary of assuming that the Blickling homilies represent the generality of preaching by a sort of Everyman preacher, because despite being transmitted anonymously they were still presumably originally intended for a particular context or audience, whose particular needs the preacher had in mind. They can be viewed as a reflection of the spirituality of the society they came out of, but are just one set of examples, not encompassing all people or all aspects of the church. As such, it is useful to think of them as context-bound.¹⁸³

Dalbey argues convincingly that the most striking characteristic of the collection is the tone of benevolence, even with the eschatological focus, thus emphasising God's mercy, as well as Judgement.¹⁸⁴ This indicates faith in a loving God, and therefore in the salvific effect of the incarnation. Yet, on the whole there is little emphasis on a personal relationship with Christ. He is mostly quite a distant figure, with little personality. He appears in most of the standard roles (Judge, Lord, Saviour etc.), but he is usually functional, rather than a contemplative and beloved object of the affective piety that was evident in poems such as the *Dream of the Rood*, and would develop further in the eleventh century and beyond.¹⁸⁵ The homilist is trying to explain and convince his audience of the need for penance rather than to draw them to a close personal relationship with God, as might a modern preacher.

¹⁸³ I do not, however, like the style of Jeffrey, in *Blickling Spirituality and the Old English Vernacular Homily*, where she speaks of the author as 'Blickling'. This seems unreflective of the origins of the manuscript, which are more likely Wessex than East Anglia (despite evidence of Anglian vocabulary) and also suggests that there is only one author, which she does not purport in her monograph.

¹⁸⁴ Dalbey, 'Hortatory Tone', p. 642.

¹⁸⁵ See further Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, p. 10, and Witalisz, 'The Blood I Souke', pp. 59 and 75.

Because the Blickling collection of homilies is comparatively small, it is possible to go through each one, giving a synopsis and describing Christ's role and significance. In order to make more of a framework, I have split the eighteen homilies into fairly natural sections, with the *sanctorale* followed by the *temporale*: saints' lives, Marian homilies, Lenten homilies, Rogationtide homilies, and a few other particularly significant feast days. Each of these sections has its own characteristics, as outlined below, but I do consider that they are part of a unified whole within the collection. By focusing on Christ many other points of interest are glossed over, some of which have already been discussed in the last few decades of writing on the homilies. There is certainly plenty more room for a comprehensive study of the Blickling Homilies.

The Saints' Lives of the Blickling Homilies

Five saints' lives account for nearly a third of the homilies of the Blickling Book. Unlike Ælfric's saints' lives, these were presumably intended for a general audience, made up of both laity and clergy, rather than being exclusively for the devotional reading of monks. Ælfric's wariness of making saints' lives, most often based on non-biblical materials, accessible to the laity, does not seem out of character, in light of his desire for orthodoxy and his fear of being misrepresented. Conversely, it is not surprising that they should be included in the collection of the unorthodox author, or authors, of the Blickling Homilies. Though half of the saints discussed were intimate with Christ in his years on earth and his teaching mission in Galilee, there is little indication of a personal relationship between him and any of the saints, which is a point of difference from the Marian homilies. On the whole, they are employed to show the power and greatness of God, and the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit in bringing about conversion. While Christ does interact with some of them in person, this is generally a minor plot element rather than a major theme. Jeffrey suggests these saints give Christ a concrete identity, as each saint is the only evangelist in each city.¹⁸⁶ The saints represent Christ, prove his existence through their miracles, and inspire others to follow him through their own belief. They model their actions on Christ and therefore are more accessible models for the audience than the remote Christ figure, who is only portrayed in the normal human states of birth, life and death in the homilies for Quinquagesima Sunday,

¹⁸⁶ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 134.

Quadragesima Sunday and Palm Sunday, all of which deal with his approaching Passion and death.

XIV. Sancte Iohannes Baptista Spel (The Birth of John the Baptist)

The homily on John the Baptist, Christ's cousin, is a convenient starting point for this discussion. The main source is a sermon by Chrysologus, though regarded as Augustine's in the early Middle Ages. Cross also identifies correspondences with Caesarius of Arles, Pseudo-Ambrose and Alanus. The Old English composer used his Latin sources with care, translating closely, with two major and one minor additions,¹⁸⁷ thus reinforcing received conventions for this feast.¹⁸⁸ The armament of John in the womb is a notable exception, which is mostly developed in the Greek tradition.¹⁸⁹ For several centuries John was figured as an unborn *miles Christi*, but there is nothing to suggest a Germanic battle context in the Blickling homily.¹⁹⁰ John leaping in the womb has been paralleled with his role in Hell, which means a womb can be seen as a type of Hell, from which there is spiritual rebirth.¹⁹¹ Biblical texts used include Galatians and Luke, and there is a minor parallel with Vercelli IX.¹⁹² John's life follows the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and after her he is the closest saint to Christ, chronologically, biologically, and in his mission. The Blickling homilist claims that the Lord Saviour revealed John's greatness, and he is the most loved and most victorious of all God's saints and prophets: 'næfre betuh wifa gebyrdum nænig mærra ne sylra geboren nære', and 'betux wifa gebyrdum ne wearþ mara mon geworden þonne Iohannes se fulwihtere'.¹⁹³ Christ himself says 'Ic hine secge maran ond selran þonne ænigne witgan'.¹⁹⁴ As the only one of Christ's blood relatives known by name, besides Mary, he is especially marked out, and the Blickling homilist generally describes him in reference to Christ, or with close allusions. He is identified as a particularly singular being, both a prophet and a saint, and thereby linking the Old Testament with the New as the confirmation of the

¹⁸⁷ Cross, 'Blickling Homily XIV', pp. 145-6.

¹⁸⁸ Hall, 'Armament of John', p. 289.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 289 and 292.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 297 and 302.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁹² Atherton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 14 (Cameron C.B.3.3.12)', *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project* (hereafter abbreviated to *Fontes*)

http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E3%2E12

¹⁹³ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 114-5, 'never among those born of woman was anyone born more illustrious or more excellent'; pp. 118-9, 'among those born of women there was not a greater man than John the Baptist' (translation emended).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7, 'I declare him to be greater and more excellent than any prophet' (translation emended).

Old and New Law,¹⁹⁵ and the only person besides Christ to have a birth celebrated by the Church. He is described as having divine power, and to be privy to God's secret judgements. So far, he seems in many ways to be a lesser version of Christ, who is the fulfilment of the Old Law, is divine and is one with God.

The worthiness and sinlessness of John's parents is emphasised, but rather than focusing on the miracle of Elizabeth conceiving in old age, the Blickling homilist argues that it makes sense, as by that point in her life God could be sure that Elizabeth and her womb were pure: 'Forþon þe mycelre tide ær þære halignes hus geclænsod beon sceolde, ond seo gastliþnes þæs Cristes wicsceaweres, ond seo gisternes gebuennes þæs Cristes engles. Ond seo heall þæs Halgan Gastes, swylc templ eallinga Gode weorþe, funden wæs Haliges Gastes snytro on to gerestenne'.¹⁹⁶ Though John's conception, unlike Mary's and Christ's, was by the usual method, and 'eall þeos mennisce gebyrd Sancte Iohanne bedyrned is',¹⁹⁷ God's role in this unusual if not unnatural conception leads to further parallels between John and Christ.¹⁹⁸

John is described as being like an angel of God, very explicitly linked to Christ: 'Ond he wæs beme, Cristes fricca on þysne middangeard, ond wæs Godes Suna spellboda, ond segnþora þæs ufancudan Kyniges, ond firena forgifnes, ond gerihtnes hæþenra þeoda'.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Kelly points out that Origen understood John to be a personified angelic spirit.²⁰⁰ Through his birth and prophesying John heralded the new dawn, that is to say the birth of Christ, who is described as 'se leoma þære soþan sunnan'.²⁰¹ John was given divine gifts before human life, and was filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb. The Blickling Homilist says he reached Heaven to receive the Holy Spirit before he came to earth,

¹⁹⁵ In fact John is here referred to as 'se godspellere', presumably a confusion with the Evangelist who is not otherwise mentioned in this homily. Alternatively, it could allude to a later statement, which says that 'he on þam gaste anum þæs godspelleres þegnunga gefylde', referring to his leaping in the womb at Christ's presence.

¹⁹⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 114-5, 'A house of holiness was first to be purified at that special time, and the hospitality of Christ's harbinger, and the benevolence of Christ's messenger was to be secured. An abode of the Holy Spirit, a temple altogether fit for God, was to be found in which the Holy Spirit's wisdom will dwell'.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119, 'St John surpasses all that are of natural birth'.

¹⁹⁸ God merely helped natural fertility in John's conception, as opposed to Mary who was born without original sin (the Immaculate Conception), and Christ, born without a human father. Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 168, argues that John, having been conceived in Heaven, 'disappears into Elizabeth in order to speak the Word in a human form.' However, at p.164, in reference to the homily for the Assumption, Jeffrey says that the homilist does not conceive of a soul without a body, which does not seem to be consistent, especially if the homilies are as unified as she suggests.

¹⁹⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 116-7, 'He was the trumpet, Christ's crier in the world; the messenger of God's Son, the standard-bearer of the supreme King; and the forgiveness of sins, the setting right of heathen nations'.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7, 'the ray of the True Sun'.

somewhat confusingly as he still had to be rescued by Christ during the Harrowing of Hell. John had been in the womb for six months when Mary visited Elizabeth, and he leapt for joy at the presence of ‘wuldres bearn’,²⁰² trying to make him known before he himself lived. This emphasises that he was destined to his role, and always filled with God’s spirit, through which he performed the work of an evangelist. John’s role as the forerunner of Christ is emphasised.

As this homily does not encompass all of John’s life, but focuses on his birth, it leaves out a considerable number of the well-known stories about John, both biblical and apocryphal, not even mentioning the major and very popular story of the harrowing of Hell.²⁰³ Considering the general impression that Ælfric considered these earlier vernacular homilies to be rather unorthodox, this seems remarkably conservative, but does draw to attention that the Blickling Homilies are in many ways ‘highlights’ of the church year, not giving full coverage.²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the Blickling homily does allude to Doomsday, for instance ‘forþon þe nu þæt is se dema Drihten Crist, seo beme Sanctus Iohannes, ond nu mid God selfa on þysne middangeard cuman wille’.²⁰⁵ The archangel Gabriel also tells John’s father, Zecharias, of John’s future role, converting people and preparing the way before Christ. The purpose of the homily is to encourage people to praise John, and to follow his teaching, but his ascetic behaviour is scarcely referred to and, in line with the gentle tone of the Blickling Homilies, it is not suggested that one should live such an extreme lifestyle. It is in terms of his relationship to Christ, almost as a type of Christ, that John matters, and the Blickling Homilist is very aware of this.

XV. The Passion of Peter and Paul (Spel be Petrus ond Paulus)

The homily for the feasts of Saints Peter and Paul focuses on their final acts and passion, showing them to be true martyrs of Christ,²⁰⁶ in attempting to prove to the Emperor Nero that Simon the magician is not the Son of God. The core of this homily is proving the identity of Christ, and recognising imposters. The two saints are differentiated, in that Peter is described as the shepherd of the church, from before Christ’s passion, whereas Paul is its teacher, after

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7, ‘Child of Glory’.

²⁰³ This is, however, discussed at length in the homily for Easter Sunday. John’s role at Christ’s baptism, his recognition of Christ as *Agnus Dei* and his own beheading are not referred to at all.

²⁰⁴ Ælfric, on the other hand, writes one homily on John’s birth, and another on his beheading, both in the first series of Catholic Homilies, with the harrowing discussed in both of these.

²⁰⁵ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 116-7, ‘as the Lord Christ is now the Judge, St John is the trumpet and will come with God Himself upon this earth.’

²⁰⁶ ‘martyr’ comes from Koine Greek *μάρτυς*, literally ‘witness’. While they do die at the end of this homily, far more focus is placed on their witnessing their faith in Christ.

the Ascension. However, they share their beliefs and having proclaimed Christ until the end of their lives both receive a crown of glory from the Lord. Christ's assurances for his apostles, recorded in the gospels, are reiterated, that they need not worry about what to say before rulers, that the Spirit of God will speak through them, and that whoever suffers in Christ's name will be preserved evermore. Peter and Paul are examples of following Christ and experiencing what he had prophesied, both the suffering and the glory. The homilist says Peter and Paul endured a great death for God's name, and now reign in glory. To emphasise the imminence of their glory, he describes the humble Peter and Paul seeing Christ summoning them. The humility of Peter is particularly emphasised, as he wishes to be crucified upside down because he does not believe he is worthy to receive the same death as Christ. Moreover, he hopes to act as the inverse of Christ, pointing his feet to Heaven, as Christ's feet had pointed to earth, signifying his descent to humanity. His actions show him trying to emulate Christ and his message, rather than replacing it with a false one, as is the case with Simon (below). Christ's humble example is closely followed by these two martyrs, and as he is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, they are the fulfilment of Christ's teaching.

The proclamations, as well as the acts of these two apostles, reveal key aspects of their characters in relation to Christ. Paul, the teacher, and first theologian, instructs lords to be obedient to God, who is Creator and Ruler of all. All men should serve 'anne Ælmihtigne God unbegripendlic[n]e, ond ungesynelicne God',²⁰⁷ who gave teaching, and sent Paul teaching. His preaching converts Nero's servants, and his and Agrippa's wives; moreover, he prophesies Nero's fall. Peter also has things to say regarding the status of Christ, reciting the Creed at the point of his death, and earlier in the homily making a fuller exposition of faith: 'Ac on Criste anum is ealles siges fylnes þurhtogen. Ond þurh þone man þe he on hine sylfne onfeng, þæt is se myccla mægenþrym ond se unbegripendlica se þurh þone man gemedemod wæs mannum to helpe'.²⁰⁸ Paul speaks more of God, whereas Peter focuses on Christ, whom he had known as a companion. His close relationship with Christ is highlighted, as Christ had spoken to him about his crucifixion a few days in advance, telling him not to be afraid. Jeffrey points out that Peter's actions reflect Christ's, with the bread miracle recollecting Christ's feeding of the four thousand, and Peter's trial before Nero comparable to Christ's

²⁰⁷ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 128-9, 'one all-powerful, incomprehensible and invisible God'.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4, 'But in Christ alone is accomplished the fullness of all victory. That was realized through the manhood that He took upon Himself: the great and incomprehensible mystery, which through His manhood was made finite as a help to men'.

before Pilate.²⁰⁹ Peter's crucifixion, echoing Christ's whether he wishes it or not, points to his important role in Heaven. He is generally shown as more of a man of action than Paul, competing against Simon with his miracles. Like Christ, Peter heals the lame and blind, casting out devils and raising people from the dead. Simon the magician makes brazen serpents, emulating Moses, but he envies Peter and spreads rumours that he is a sorcerer. He can only attempt to be a 'type' of Christ, as is Moses, whereas in fact he is the antitype, supported by demons. He is also a countertype of Peter, often known as Simon Peter.²¹⁰

Simon the sorcerer is a central character in the passion of Peter and Paul, and is particularly important in respect to this thesis because he poses as the Son of God. His magic and trickery fool Nero, although Peter says he is in fact a sorcerer and enemy to the True God. Nero is not portrayed as an absolute villain as per usual, and at points it seems as though he could be persuaded either way, perhaps representative of the audience of the homilies: he shows understanding of fundamental Christian doctrine, saying that 'God manap ælcne man ond lufap'.²¹¹ He brings the three together, so that they contest the identity of Christ. Simon calls Peter and Paul disciples of the Nazarene Saviour, and Teacher. When Nero asks who is the Christ, Peter defines him by reference to Simon, telling him that it is the one whom the sorcerer falsely declares himself to be, but Simon is 'ðæs mannes [c]niht, ond his weorc syndon deofollicu'.²¹² As Jeffrey points out, this echoes Peter denying Christ in the Gospel accounts of the passion.²¹³ Peter works hard trying to persuade Nero that Simon is a fraud, and gives him a letter to read, written by Pilate following the crucifixion of Christ. This letter speaks of Jewish prophecy concerning Christ, who is God's holy Son, King, and born of a pure virgin. Having performed miracles in Judea, people recognised him as the Son of God, and the priests became jealous and so brought about his crucifixion. He rose from the dead, and though the guards were bribed they still told the truth about what had happened.

²⁰⁹ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 118.

²¹⁰ In response to being correctly identified as Christ and Son of God, Christ changed Simon's name to Peter at Matthew 16.16-18: 'Respondens Simon Petrus dixit tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi. Respondens autem Iesus dixit ei beatus es Simon Bar Iona quia caro et sanguis non revelavit tibi sed Pater meus qui in caelis est. Et ego dico tibi quia tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et portae inferi non praevallebunt adversum eam.' 'Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.'

²¹¹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 122-3, 'God instructs and loves every man'.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 'a child of humanity and his works are devilish'.

²¹³ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 106.

However, Nero is convinced of Simon's claim to be Son of God due to his supposed miracles. As in Pilate's letter, Simon claims to be able to rise from the dead, and arranges to have a sheep decapitated in the dark instead of himself so that he can appear to Nero again after three days. Unlike Christ's guards, Simon's guards are afraid for their lives and so lie to protect themselves. He also seems to perform miracles, claiming to be able to fly, in a twisting of the Ascension, though Peter can see that he is being raised by devils, and makes them release him, so that he dies. Simon, in pretending to be the Son of God, is entirely un-Christ like; he is boastful and envious, and tries to deceive. As with the Antichrist in Wulfstan's homilies, he defines Christ by what he is not. However, from Nero's perspective he proves himself, and it is Peter and Paul that are in place of the jealous priests in bringing about his death. All in all, Nero is surprisingly balanced, and while his final verdict is in favour of Simon, his putting Peter and Paul to death is, after all, no more than he thought he had done to Simon.

The passion of these two saints displays an example of the courage needed to follow Christ, and the reward promised is presumably intended as a comfort for those in adversity. It is also a strong warning to not be deceived by false witness and glamourised by sorcery, as even if others superficially appear to be Christ, there is only one, and he is not based on lies and deceit. There is a danger that with Christ's life and acts so well known, others may fraudulently lay claim to them, but a true believer will not be fooled.

XVI. The Feast of St Michael the Archangel (To Sancte Michaheles Mæssan)

Next in the re-established order of the Blickling Homilies is the Feast of St Michael the Archangel. One scene in this homily has generated considerable interest, as it describes Hell, based on the description of the north in *Visio Pauli*, and has parallels to a passage from *Beowulf*, ll.1408-41. Collins argues that *Beowulf* was directly influenced by this homily, and is therefore of a later date.²¹⁴ Both Swisher and Cooke note the use of 'harne stan', which, as in *Beowulf* 1415a, is 'a monumental standing stone serving as a boundary marker' (Cooke), here a frontier between this world and Hell.²¹⁵ Murphy picks up on the idea of the north, noting its monstrous and hellish nature in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, and discusses the significance of heathen gods, equatable to devils, in the pagan north.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Collins, 'Dating of Beowulf', p. 61.

²¹⁵ Cooke, 'Two Notes', p. 298, Swisher, 'Hoar Stone', pp. 133 and 135. This homily is numbered XVII by Morris, which is how it is referred to by Swisher and Murphy, before Kelly's new edition in 2003.

²¹⁶ Murphy, 'North', pp. 66-7, 74.

Although Christ is seldom mentioned, Michael's actions emulate his. There is a small amount of biblical material concerning Michael: he is mentioned in the Book of Daniel, as a helper and prince, who will stand at the end of time. In Revelation this is fulfilled, when he, with his angels, fights the dragon Satan, and casts him out of Heaven.²¹⁷ Most material about Michael is apocryphal. The Blickling homilist builds on this limited biblical material, but focuses far less on Michael's overarching role as Christ's lieutenant than he does on his relationship with the people of Campania. This is a place special to Michael, of which he is guardian and creator, and where he consecrated a church: all roles which might as well be ascribed to God. Kelly notes that Michael has always been the guardian angel of God's people, first the Israelites, and now the Church.²¹⁸ This homily shows his fulfilment of this role within an earthly setting, and its main focus is the establishment of a church, according to Michael's wishes.

In the homily, Michael is described as the archangel of the Heavenly King, who is always in his sight. The people of Campania pray both to the living God and to the holy archangel Michael, and they ask Michael for support in battle against their heathen enemies. God listens to their prayers, and Michael protects the people: the assistance of angels makes them victorious in battle. All the people bow to 'þæm Cyninga Cyninge, to Criste sylfum',²¹⁹ and give thanks both to Almighty God and to their champion, Michael. The importance of intercession is recognised here: while the people pray to both God and to Michael, it is God who hears the prayers and Michael who acts as God's response to them. Michael is an intermediary, and while he acts independently it is always in accordance with the will of God.

²¹⁷ Daniel 10.13 'principes autem regni Persarum restitit mihi viginti et uno diebus et ecce Machahel unus de principibus primis venit in adiutorium meum et ego remansi ibi iuxta regem Persarum'; But the prince of the kingdom of the Persians resisted me one and twenty days: and behold Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I remained there by the king of the Persians. Daniel 10.21 'verumtamen adnuntiabo tibi quod expressum est in scriptura veritatis et nemo est adiutor meus in omnibus his nisi Michahel princeps vester'; But I will tell thee what is set down in the scripture of truth: and none is my helper in all these things, but Michael your prince. Dan 12.1 'in tempore autem illo consurget Michahel princeps magnus qui stat pro filiis populi tui et veniet tempus quale non fuit ab eo quo gentes esse coeperunt usque ad tempus illud et in tempore illo salvabitur populus tuus omnis qui inventus fuerit scriptus in libro'; But at that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people: and a time shall come, such as never was from the time that nations began, even until that time. And at that time shall thy people be saved, every one that shall be found written in the book. Revelation 1.7-9 'et factum est proelium in caelo Michahel et angeli eius proeliabantur cum dracone et draco pugnabat et angeli eius et non valuerunt neque locus inventus est eorum amplius in caelo et proiectus est draco ille magnus serpens antiquus qui vocatur Diabolus et Satanas qui seducit universum orbem proiectus est in terram et angeli eius cum illo missi sunt'; And there was a great battle in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought, and his angels. And they prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in Heaven. And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world. And he was cast unto the earth: and his angels were thrown down with him.

²¹⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 190.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1, 'the King of Kings, Christ himself'.

The homilist is carefully orthodox in this, and Michael's actions are not presented out of the context of his relationship to God. Michael is, however, rarely related to Christ in particular, perhaps because of the fact that there is no recorded relationship between them except with Christ as enthroned with the Father as King of Kings, which is just how the people of Campania refer to Christ. As an angel, Michael is not so much a saint following the human Christ as he is the messenger of the divine and immortal Lord, enthroned in Heaven.

XVII. The Feast of St Martin (To Sancte Martines Mæssan)

St Martin was a popular subject of Old English homilies, and is in all the collections I am discussing except Wulfstan's, which does not include any saints' lives. Napier notes that the Life of St Martin is also in the Vercelli and Junius manuscripts,²²⁰ with the English versions much shorter than Sulpicius Severus's Latin original.²²¹ Dalbey shows that the anonymous homilies all follow an intermediate source, with minor variation. These homilies depict Martin as a shepherd, sheltering the faithful and leading by example, whereas for Ælfric Martin is a merciful and infallible *miles Christi* as in Sulpicius Severus, whose chief duty is to overthrow the devil. He seems more like God on earth than a special human. This difference may be due to the time of composition of the homilies, with Ælfric's audience dealing with violent invasions and therefore responding to a military image.²²² Additionally, Gailes points out that the Blickling homily on Martin is designed to be listened to, not read, as is Ælfric's homily on the same subject, and it is therefore less polished, with unsophisticated vocabulary, really a series of anecdotes within a biographical framework.²²³

St Martin is the model of piety winning over a secular alternative. He is the only monk in the Blickling homilies, reflecting their generally non-monastic audience. Though his parents want him in a worldly occupation, he runs away to be baptised, and remains in God's service forever. As a soldier, having already given away everything else he owned, with Christ-like compassion he gives half his cloak to a beggar. Others are filled with compunction as they realise they should have helped the beggar themselves, as they had more to give, though some scorn Martin. Christ appears to Martin in a dream, wearing the cloak, showing that a good act to anyone in need is a good act to God. Jeffrey suggests that this dream fuses together Christ, Martin and the beggar.²²⁴ Throughout his life, Martin remains a

²²⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 and 86, hereafter abbreviated to Junius.

²²¹ Napier 'Notes on Blickling', p. 303.

²²² Dalbey 'Good Shepherd', pp. 421-2.

²²³ Gailes, 'Longer Life', p. 36.

²²⁴ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 122.

good example of a Christian to those around him, teaching them in order to draw them to a closer relationship with Christ, founding a monastery and performing miracles. He breaks down idols, and defeats fiery demons. He even brings people back to life, due to his compassion, so that they may be saved through baptism, whether they deserve it or not. Jeffrey says his healings are modelled on Christ's death and resurrection, in which both God and his saints are needed.²²⁵ It seems to me that when Martin raises people from the dead it is more in response to Christ raising Lazarus, who also needed to be saved, rather than Christ, dying without sin, and rising having conquered death for everyone. Martin himself looks forward to his death as a chance to be with Christ, though he is concerned about his work needing to be done on earth. He emulates Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, reluctant to die and leave his work, but saying 'sie þæs þin willa'.²²⁶ A final example of the importance in recognising the true Christ is given by Sulpicius Severus, but is cut off in the Blickling Homily. In this the devil appears to Martin at his death, disguised as the enthroned Christ. Martin is not convinced by his purple robes and diadem, and wishes to see his wounds. Unfortunately, the lacuna in the Blickling Book means this homily breaks off with the appearance of the devil.

The relationship between Martin and Christ seems to be a close and personal one, though the person of Christ is not at all dwelt upon except in reference to Martin, and Christ's only role in the plot is as the beggar, later reappearing in Martin's dream. As with the other saints, Martin reflects and transmits Christ's teachings, and by showing his effect on others ought to influence the Anglo-Saxon audience. Christ is shown both testing and rewarding Martin, and it is his compassion and mercy that most influences Martin's behaviour.

XVIII. *St Andrew (S. Andreas)*

The homily for the feast of St Andrew is broken off at the beginning and end, and the remaining fragment is quite short. However, what does remain is closely aligned to the Vercelli Book's poem *Andreas*. Sources include the anonymous Latin *Acta Andreae et Matthiae*, the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Mattheia eis ten Polin ton Anthropophagon*, and the gospels of Matthew and Luke.²²⁷ Of all of the saints' lives in the Blickling Book, it is the one in which Christ plays the most active part, especially considering the brevity of the text.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²²⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 154-5, 'let it be according to your will'.

²²⁷ Rosser, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 19 (Cameron C.B.3.3.1)', *Fontes*
http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E3%2E1
 The numbering is not based on Kelly's, but Morris's edition.

Christ visits Matthew, imprisoned and blinded by the Mermedonian cannibals, restores his sight to him and promises he will never abandon him, but will send him help within a few days. This parallels gospel passages, both with Christ's healing miracles and with the promise of the Holy Spirit when Christ is ascending. Blinding might also have a special significance, as Matthew is the evangelist to the Jews, who are often regarded as blind to Christ, as in Romans 11.25 'caecitas ex parte contigit in Israhel',²²⁸ and who are continually being tormented by foreign oppressors.

In this case, however, Christ sends Andrew. Presumably he could have saved Matthew himself, but by using Andrew to free Matthew he both tests his faith and proves his power, showing that his saints represent him on earth. He makes happen what Andrew believes impossible. Indeed, when Andrew goes to the shore, believing it is not possible to reach Matthew before he should be killed, he finds a vessel, which takes him and his companions despite their lack of a fare. It is revealed to the audience, though not to Andrew, that Christ is the helmsman. He tests the faith of Andrew and his disciples: when Andrew's followers are frightened in the storm, the helmsman tells Andrew to calm them, so Andrew speaks of Christ stilling the storm on the sea of Galilee. He also gives Andrew's followers the chance to disembark, but they remain loyal to their leader and faithful to their mission. After sleeping, they find themselves at their destination unexpectedly quickly, and Andrew realises the helmsman was Christ. He speaks of him in terms referring to the incarnation: 'Witon we þæt ure Drihten mid us wæs on þæm scipe ond we hine ne ongeaton. He hine geeaðmedde swa steorreda, ond he hine æteowde swa swa man us to costiænne', and he prays for him to be present.²²⁹ Christ comes in the form of a beautiful child, and, unconcerned about not being recognised earlier, instructs Andrew in his task. Christ speaks of his own suffering, which he says he endured so that his followers would see how to suffer. Here the text breaks off.

Christ is depicted in this homily as a good and faithful Lord. His retainer Matthew has undergone suffering for his sake, and in repayment he sends Andrew to act on his behalf and to free Matthew. Andrew's role is not very glorious, lamenting his suffering and showing doubt, which would hardly be inspirational for the audience.²³⁰ It is very clear that Andrew is not acting alone, but that Christ is with him and both guiding and impelling him. He is, quite literally, steering the ship. Christ is also seen in a testing role, again as a leader of his

²²⁸ Douay-Rheims translation 'blindness in part is happened to Israel'.

²²⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 160-2, 'We now know that our Lord was with us in the boat and we did not recognize him. He humbled himself to be a helmsman and revealed himself to us as a man in order to test us'.

²³⁰ DeGregorio, 'Prose Legends of St Andrew', pp. 459 and 462.

apostles. The faith and courage of Andrew and his men are deliberately challenged, and Matthew in prison is also suffering for his loyalty to Christ. Christ does not, however, cause suffering, any more than he caused his own, but provides resources so that it can be endured and overcome, putting the responsibility on those loyal to him in the world. In a way, he lets the heroism be passed on to his followers rather than claiming it for himself.

Summary

Throughout the saints' lives of the Blickling Book, Christ is ever present as an inspirational and assisting figure, but rarely in an overtly active way. Most of the saints can be closely paralleled with Christ, as indeed most are his companions from his time on earth, and all are male, in some kind of leadership role. Many of these lives were popular in the Anglo-Saxon church and the stories are recorded in other texts. The Blickling homilist shows little innovation here, with rather a good deal of orthodoxy, and no questionable depictions of Christ.

The Marian Homilies

The homilies of the Blickling manuscript show a profound love of the Mother of Christ, if not a particularly good grasp of Latin or necessarily a good exposition of the sources available. Unlike the hagiography above, these texts could not be considered orthodox, but show a jumble of apocryphal traditions. There are two homilies which particularly dwell on Mary: I. the *Incarnation of Our Lord*, and XIII. the *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, which is the final text of the *temporale* section of the Blickling Book. These are major feasts in their own right, and while most of the eighteen homilies are important in the church's year, these feasts, along with Easter Sunday and Pentecost, are particularly significant, and have both remained Holy Days of Obligation in the Catholic Church. The homilist does not approach the character of Mary in quite the usual way. She is not simply devout, obedient, demure and submissive; rather, she is shown to be reluctant, and almost petulant. However, the homilist sympathises with her and never questions her sanctity or her relationship to Christ. Christ himself is shown to be far more Godly than human, which is somewhat surprising given the point of the Incarnation. Much more time is spent on his divine purpose, both in his birth and in taking up Mary, and yet despite this he does not appear to be entirely in control of either situation.

I. Incarnation of the Lord (In Natali Domini)

This homily draws from a range of anonymous texts, mostly mistakenly attributed to Augustine, as well as Bede's Homily 1.3 and Peter Chrysologus's Sermon 143.²³¹ Wright has recently identified a further Pseudo-Augustine source, Sermon 125.²³² Ó Carragáin describes Christ's incarnation in this homily as a sacred gift exchange, with Christ giving men his blood and the Heavenly Kingdom.²³³ Clayton argues that while the homilist could have composed a more Mariological text, he chose to be Christological.²³⁴ She claims that this homily is very different from the others in the Book, with a notable emphasis on Christ and Mary's humility and purity.²³⁵

The homily for *In Natali Domini* begins with the premise that Jesus came into the world to reveal his divine form and to overcome sin. This quickly develops into an expository comparison between Eve and Mary. Eve signifies unhappiness, whereas 'Maria cende þonne Drihten on blisse'.²³⁶ Eve was lustful, but 'Maria cende þone mildheortan ond þone unsceppendan Crist on hire innoþe',²³⁷ having conceived through Gabriel's greeting. In contrast to Eve's sorrow, 'Maria brohte þurh heo þone ecean gefean eallum middangearde... Se Halga Gast seow þæt clæne sæd on þone unbesmitenan innop, forþon heo fæmne cende, forðon heo wæs fæmne geeacnod'.²³⁸ The typological comparison between Mary and Eve brings to the forefront the Incarnation of Christ as the fulfilment of God's covenant, made necessary by the sin of humanity, represented in Eve. Above all, Christ is a symbol of joy and hope.

The angel speaks at length to Mary, telling her that Christ will descend from the Heavenly Realm and from angelic majesty into her womb, humbling himself, and choosing her as his mother. However, though Mary's womb receives him it does not confine him: 'Heo onfeng on hire medmycclan bosm God Fæder Sunu, þone ne magon befor heofon ond eorþe'.²³⁹ Christ is presented primarily as majestic and humble, with the contrast emphasising

²³¹ Clayton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 1 (Cameron C.B.3.4.18)', *Fontes* http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E4%2E18

²³² Wright, 'New Latin Source', p. 254.

²³³ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, p. 323.

²³⁴ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 222.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 222 and 229.

²³⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 2-3, 'Mary brought forth the Lord with rejoicing'.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Mary conceived in her womb the merciful and innocent Christ'.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Mary brought forth through herself the Everlasting Joy of the entire world... The Holy Spirit sowed the pure seed in the undefiled womb... so she, while remaining a virgin, conceived and became a mother'.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4, 'She received into her humble bosom the Son of God the Father, whom Heaven and earth could not comprehend'.

both aspects. Mary's womb is dwelt upon at length, and is a 'templ þære geþungennesse',²⁴⁰ which the Heavenly King enters. He also enters her heart, and is her helper, just as she is the handmaiden of the Lord. She is the Mother of the Creator, who is a humble and merciful King. This emphasises both Christ's greatness and humility, as well as the very special status and role of Mary. The miraculous nature of the incarnation is celebrated, rather than explained.

Mary's womb is described as Christ's bridal chamber and house. Seeking her womb, he is depicted as 'se gesibsuma cyning',²⁴¹ highlighting the kindness and generosity of the Incarnation. He prepares himself for human life there, as 'þa Drihten on þære fæmnan brydbure, ond on þæm gerisnlican hehsetle, onfeng lichoman gegyrelan to his godcundnesse',²⁴² and at nine months, quoting the prophet, 'Drihten asette on sunnan his hus, ond of þæm uteode swa swa brydguma of his brydbure'.²⁴³ The throne of Christ is described as being in Heaven, as well as in Mary's womb, as the 'heofonlice goldhord',²⁴⁴ descended into the world from the throne of our Creator, Christ, the Son of the Living God, in order to honour and adorn the bride. It is noteworthy that Christ, the Son of God, is described as Creator, rather than God himself. This is consistent with New Testament Christology, where the *Logos* of John's gospel is spoken of as the Creator of all,²⁴⁵ and yet the 'Creator' is more often thought of in a separate role to Christ's. This highlights Christ's eternity with God: the incarnation is not his beginning in life, but merely his taking up of a new residence. Christ dwelt on the earth and came to yet another throne, the Rood. Christ's two earthly 'thrones' are as humble as possible: the womb of a young unmarried girl, and an instrument of death and torture. Yet, due to his humility and sacrifice, he exalts them to the immeasurable status of his Heavenly throne. He is described in what could be considered heroic terms, since after his thrones are described the homilist says he gave the red gem (his holy blood) for all to partake of, suggesting the image of the gift-stool. More than once he is called King of Glory

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, 'temple of piety and purity'.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 'the peace-loving King'.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, '[t]he Lord in the chamber of the Virgin, in that appropriate throne, took on a bodily garment for his divinity'.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 'the Lord has set his house in the sun, and from it he has gone forth as a bridegroom from his bridal chamber'. The second part of this seems to allude to a mix of Joel 2:16 and Psalm 19:5, though I can find no reference to setting a house in the sun.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 'Heavenly Treasure'. In this homily, Christ is also described as 'þæt goldhord þæs mægenþrymmes', 'the treasure of divine majesty'.

²⁴⁵ John 1.1-3, 'In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum hoc erat in principio apud Deum omnia per ipsum facta sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est', 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made.'

and Lord, highlighting this role, and described as ‘hyhtenda gigant’, he is linked to the image of God in the Psalms, probably referring more to his greatness compared to other earth-dwellers than to his physical proportions.²⁴⁶

As with the other saints, Mary is used as a point of reference for the audience of the Blickling Homilies. Because the Heavenly King was in her, Mary was protected by the Heavenly Hosts, as the homilist says are all holy souls in which the King of Peace dwells. Conversely, Christ’s dwelling place is not in the heart of any man who does not possess mercy. Christ both physically and spiritually dwells in Mary, though only spiritually in everybody else. Christ, presented in so much glory, seems a rather more distant figure than the very human Mary, despite his humility and mercy.

A striking aspect of this homily is that Mary ponders the words of the angel for a long time without giving a reply. The angel continues to praise her with architectural imagery, as a temple and ‘Cristes brydbur’,²⁴⁷ telling her how God will enter her, but this drama remains a monologue longer than the angel is comfortable with, so that he goes on to ask ‘Ondswara, þu fæmne, to hwon yldestu middangeard to onlyhtenne? Ond Drihtnes engel bideþ þinre gebafunga...Eala þu eadige Maria, eall þeos gehæftworld bideþ þinre gebafunga’.²⁴⁸ He calls her the mother of the Creator, adhering to the deep Christian paradox of the incarnation in which the Creator grows out of one of the objects of his creation. While Mary does eventually accede, full of praise for God, this seeming hesitation makes her seem a lot more human, and is in line with the Mary later presented in the homily for the Assumption, who is also less unquestioningly accepting of her fate than in the usual depictions of the Virgin. Whether this is to add some suspense to the story, highlight the significance of what Mary is taking on, or it is a common aspect in some versions of the tale, Mary’s assent is more significant than usual as she appears to consider refusing, and thus upsetting God’s plans, like her predecessor, Eve. While the whole event is orchestrated by God, some human freewill is also evident. Nonetheless, the Omnipotent King does have his way.

The homilist exhorts us to love and praise the Creator, like Mary: she proclaims the Magnificat, in praise of God, which would become a major prayer of the church. The prayer has a unique ring in this context, highlighting both the honour of what Mary is taking on in

²⁴⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 7, ‘exulting giant’, Psalms 18.6 ‘exultavit ut gigans’.

²⁴⁷ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 4-5, ‘Christ’s bride-bower’.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ‘O Virgin, reply, “Why do you tarry to edify the earth?” The angel of the Lord awaits your consent... Oh blessed Mary all this enslaved world awaits your consent.’

Christ, and her devotion in doing so. The homilist instructs his audience to rejoice in the union of God and humankind, with the bridegroom (Christ) and the bride (Mary) signifying Christ and the holy Church, as well as being mother and Son. We are to honour Christ lying in the manger, and the garments of Christ's humanity through which our nature is renewed. This imagery is used twice in this homily, and along with Vercelli XVII it is the only time I have encountered Christ's humanity as a 'gegyrelan',²⁴⁹ something that might be worn or taken off, which highlights his permanent divinity over his transient humanity. Christ sought us in our exile, as in his great mercy and humility he wished to help us. This rather downplays the redeeming act. As a visitor, Christ is not really of the earth, and he does not seem to be presented as fully human. The Lord is the firmest support and best shield against the temptations of the devil. Only once in this homily does the author remind his audience that as Christ will judge the living and the dead on Doomsday, all creatures need fear him. Far more emphasis is put on praise. On the whole, the incarnation seems not unlike an alien abduction, with a foreign being implanted in a not altogether willing receptacle. Mary is particularly holy because of Christ, and yet the homilist seems to have more of a grasp on her identity.

XIII. Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Sancta Maria Mater Domini Nostri Iesu Cristi)

This is the messiest of all the Blickling homilies, with poorly conflated sources, and it has attracted critical attention. Identified sources include the anonymous *Transitus Mariae* B2 and C, as well as the gospels of Luke and Matthew, and the Psalms.²⁵⁰ Willard explained that there are two types of apocalyptic narratives on the Assumption, regarding the way Mary is taken into Heaven: translation, and resurrection.²⁵¹ He argued that the death and bodily ascension of Mary is one of the most popular New Testament apocalyptic narratives, possibly originating from the fifth century in Egypt.²⁵² The Old English is faithful to the source, with both translation and resurrection, though the translator's apparently poor Latin has produced more errors.²⁵³ Clayton describes the homily as 'bewildering',²⁵⁴ a confused and confusing apocryphal account of the Assumption, composed by someone unskilled, and barely competent in Latin.²⁵⁵ Clayton attributes the motive of joining the two sermons to a desire to

²⁴⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 6-7, 'garment'.

²⁵⁰ Clayton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 13 (Cameron C.B.3.3.20)', *Fontes* http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E3%2E20

²⁵¹ Willard, 'Two Accounts', p. 1.

²⁵² Willard, 'On Blickling Homily XIII', p. 1.

²⁵³ Willard, 'Two Accounts', p. 4.

²⁵⁴ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 233.

²⁵⁵ Clayton, 'Blickling Homily XIII', p. 25.

assert the full resurrection and assumption of the Virgin's body.²⁵⁶ Kabir suggests that this homily represents an attempt to create a vernacular Assumption narrative more in line with the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the feast than the Latin texts. She notes that whereas the Latin texts do not make a clear separation, in the Anglo-Saxon text Christ comes from Heaven, whereas Mary goes to Paradise.²⁵⁷ Mary is assumed into Heaven a comical number of times with little attention being paid to producing a straightforward narrative, as the homilist is far more intent on emphasising her Assumption than he is in presenting a sensible chronological tale. Willard noted that both this homily and the Latin source are bad texts, but that Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 198,²⁵⁸ a manuscript containing mostly Ælfric's homilies, also contains the text, with slight variants, and this text verifies the accuracy of the Blickling homily, as it supports it in every detail. Willard believes that after completion, the vernacular text was emended.²⁵⁹ Nellis builds on this as she suggests that gaps may have been left due to translation difficulties, later filled in in the wrong place.²⁶⁰ Neville holds that the translator presumed that any action is assumption, and was particularly determined to describe the physical assumption.²⁶¹ Mary is both passive and egocentric, but the narrator, in his devotion, is supportive of her. Mary straddles life and death: while Christ does the same, he absorbs his divinity into his humanity, and conflates his body and soul, whereas Mary is more hanging in between, highlighting the awkward nature of the spiritual and physical assumption.²⁶² Neville points out that it was the apocryphal stories, rather than the Assumption itself, that Ælfric opposed.²⁶³

As with the homily for the Incarnation, Mary is not entirely pliant, but nonetheless follows tradition in all the essential elements. Christ has a role to play in the plot, but more importantly the homily reveals certain perceptions about his relationship both with Mary and with the apostles, who are the central figures in the homily. It speaks both of Mary's nature, and of the role of the apostles within the church. Of the other saints written about in the Blickling manuscript, Peter, Paul and Michael all play a role in this homily, with Andrew and Matthew presumably silent members of the group.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁵⁷ Kabir, *Paradise*, p. 59.

²⁵⁸ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College hereafter abbreviated to CCCC.

²⁵⁹ Willard, 'On Blickling Homily XIII', pp. 2, 4, 16, and 'Two Accounts', p. 4.

²⁶⁰ Nellis, 'Misplaced Passages', p. 399.

²⁶¹ Neville, 'Selves', pp. 144-5.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 148-9, 151-2.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 142.

Mary is portrayed as very devout, in a continuous state of prayer after the Ascension of Christ, but when she is told by an angel of her impending death she both rejoices and is upset, and she gathers people around her to await her death. Her anxiety is picked up on by the people, who wonder why she should be afraid when she has been so good, and therefore what death will mean for them. The apostles comfort her, as the Lord, ‘ure beboda Lareow’,²⁶⁴ had told them what would happen. John had seen Christ in the city that day, where he heard the Word of God within a cloud. The Lord then comes to them where they are gathered, and illuminates them with the Holy Spirit, and a great light shines. He tells Mary not to be sad about her earthly death as she is privileged by God and great glory is prepared for her. He tells Peter he will be with him until the end of time. Peter blesses him, praising him for his mercy, and asking him to stay and illuminate the world, referring to the light that is shining. Again, Christ’s role seems to be primarily to strengthen the position of the apostles, as they act as intermediaries between him and Mary, and act as God’s messengers to her.

Christ comes again, in a cloud with angels, and enters the house. He blesses Mary, receives her soul, to be eternally glorified by God and cleansed by absolution, and gives it to St Michael. This is the first assumption. He gives instructions for her burial, and Mary’s body cries out, still slightly petulant, ‘Wes þu min gemyndig, þu gewuldroda Cyning, forþon ic beo þin hondgeweorc. Ond wes þu min gemyndig, forþon ic healde þinra beboda goldhord’.²⁶⁵ He replies ‘Ne forlæte ic þe næfre, min meregrot, ne ic þe næfre ne forlæte, min eorclanstan, forþon þe þu eart soplice Godes templ’,²⁶⁶ and then he ascends. This imagery draws on that of the homily for the Incarnation, with emphasis on Christ never leaving those he dwells within.

False witness is the next issue in the homily, with the Jewish leaders, having conspired with Satan, saying that Mary brought forth the ‘beswican’.²⁶⁷ When they attack Mary’s bier they are blinded, and one is suspended in the air. Peter tells the leader that the enemy of mankind blinded his heart so as not to believe that Christ was the true God and would save him, and makes them confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he rose from the dead, before they can be released and healed. The leader also has to kiss Mary’s bier, acknowledging her as the Mother and God as the Father of Christ. The apostles continue

²⁶⁴ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 100-1, ‘Teacher of our Precepts’.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5, ‘Be you mindful, you glorified King, that I am your handiwork. Be mindful... because I keep the treasure-hoard of your decrees’.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ‘Since you are truly the temple of God, I will never leave you, my pearl; I will never leave you, my jewel’.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7, ‘Deceiver’.

to follow the Lord Jesus Christ's commands, carrying the bier to the place that he had commanded. Christ arrives with his angels, blesses them, and Michael, again, receives Mary's soul into the clouds. The Lord commands the clouds to go to Paradise and deposit the soul, which will be there forever. This second progression to Mary's assumption re-emphasises the power of the apostles and their obedience to Christ, possibly even more than it speaks of Mary's holiness. True understanding and belief in Christ is essential for healing, but people are willing to convert when there is a sufficient motive, or they are suddenly inspired to belief.

Christ then gives the apostles, and thus the audience, a summary account of his history. This is effectively an autobiographical account of his role as Lord. He tells them that the Father sent him for the Passion, and he was afterwards, by the Father's command, restored to his body and to his followers. He was recently sitting on the throne above humankind, and judged the twelve nations among the three peoples of Israel. He speaks of Mary as an 'unbesmiten temple',²⁶⁸ and he asks the apostles for ideas of what he should do with her. Whether this is because he is meant to be unsure, or it is a test for the apostles, or it is a chance for the audience to consider options, is unclear. The disciples say he should raise her body from death, and the Lord rejoices at this suggestion, and says he will do it according to their will, in an inversion of their usual relationship. He instructs Gabriel to roll the stone from the tomb, and Michael presents Mary's soul. The Lord tells Mary's body to arise. She embraces his feet and glorifies him. The Lord then raises her and kisses her, and gives her to Michael. She is raised into the clouds before the Lord's presence, in the third version of the assumption in this homily, the first which is physical. He calls his apostles to him in the clouds, and gives them the kiss of peace and the Holy Spirit, which will be with them until the end, and commands the angels to sing. He is called the God of Israel, who should be exalted with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever. The Magnificat follows, and the homilist exhorts the audience to implore Mary to be a merciful advocate 'ondweardes rædes ond eces wuldres',²⁶⁹ with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary is thus assumed three times, twice spiritually and once corporeally. The important matter is not so much the confused chronology, but the roles the different people play. Each time, Christ is personally present to take Mary up. Michael is always the

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9, 'immaculate temple'.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-3, 'of present benefits and eternal glory' in Kelly's translation, but more literally 'of present counsel'.

intermediary who actually removes her to Heaven. The apostles are also always present, as witnesses, representative of the church, but they also represent Christ to Mary, with the knowledge they have been privileged to acquire about her death. With so much emphasis placed on the Assumption, Mary's role as the mother of Christ is highly valued, though it is not discussed in the same detail that it is in the homily for the Incarnation. Christ is a central figure in the narrative, and yet is fairly one dimensional, though he does express his relationship to God when he briefly discusses his passion and resurrection. Mary is the most complex character by far, rather opposed to her impending death, and while Peter at least gets a somewhat developed role, Christ's is wooden and impersonal.

Summary

It is because of Christ that Mary is holy, and yet he definitely plays second fiddle to her in the Marian homilies. Mary's interaction with his angels and apostles says far more about her than about him, showing her to be more human and less idealised than she normally is as the mother of God, and yet venerated all the more because of this.

The Lenten Homilies

In this section I will be discussing the Blickling Homilies for the extended Lenten season, including three Sundays in Lent, and both Quinquagesima Sunday, the name of the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, and Palm Sunday, which marks the transition into Holy Week with the reading of texts on Christ's entry into Jerusalem and the Passion. In Kelly's brief history of the Lenten season, he notes that the duration of Lent varied in the early centuries of the church, and that the word 'Lent', or 'spring', does not express the six-week period of spiritual discipline in the way the Latin Quadragesima or Greek Tesseractoste does. Quinquagesima Sunday is part of the preparatory cycle.²⁷⁰ Lent was developed in the Western church as a period of preparation for Pascha, the nocturnal festival of the Saturday night and Sunday morning, which was a commemoration of both the passion and resurrection.²⁷¹ Good Friday as a distinct commemoration of the passion of Christ did not exist. The season was also particularly important for those preparing for baptism at the great feast, and the origin of Lent may have been in order to have a period of instruction and fasting over six weeks, which was

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

extended by another six days by the end of the third century.²⁷² The last week of this, now Holy Week, remained more intense.²⁷³ Baptised members of the church were meant to approach Pascha each year as if for the first time, and thus what is relevant for the catechumens is also conveniently relevant to all members of the church. By the tenth century, the time of this collection, infant baptism had become the norm in Christian societies, so Easter became a time for the renewal of the commitment to Christ.²⁷⁴ Dalbey notes that this is the largest group in the Blickling Book, and that none of the homilies are unusual in subject or form, though they tend to a tropological emphasis rather than getting into theological arguments.²⁷⁵

*II Quinquagesima Sunday*²⁷⁶

The main source for Quinquagesima Sunday is Gregory the Great's homily *Dominica in Quinquagesima*²⁷⁷ and the pericope is Luke 18:31-44, the healing of the blind beggar, which the homilist tells us is a paradigm for eternal life. In the pericope, the Lord explains to his apostles what is to happen, telling them that they are going to Jerusalem, where he will suffer, in order to fulfil the writings about the Son of Man. He says he will be delivered into the hands of heathens and ridiculed, and alludes to his death and resurrection. When Christ, called 'the Saviour', passes near Jericho, a blind beggar asks who it is, and is told it is Jesus of Nazareth. He calls out to him as 'Son of David', asking him for mercy, and refuses to be quiet. The Saviour asks the blind man to be brought to Him, and he grants him sight, 'since your personal faith has made you whole'. The beggar praises and worships him.

The pericope's penitential theme is appropriate for its place in the liturgical calendar. Within it, Christ is depicted as healer, both by his actions and being called 'Hælend', of royal Jewish descent by being linked to David. On the most local level, he is 'Hælend se Nazarenisca'.²⁷⁸ Zacher notes that while there were no Jews in Anglo-Saxon England, they were written about, and occupied an imaginary position, as 'objects for continued

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170. Further Lenten practices are discussed in reference to the other collections of homilies.

²⁷⁵ Dalbey, 'Themes and Techniques', p. 221.

²⁷⁶ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 43, uses the term 'Shrove Sunday', which she suggests is suitable for the need to pray through 'scrift spræc', 'confessional speech'.

²⁷⁷ Atherton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 2 (Cameron C.B.3.2.8)', *Fontes*

http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E2%2E8. A couple of lines have analogues in Ælfric's writing.

²⁷⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 10-11, 'Jesus of Nazareth' according to Kelly, but whilst Jesus does in fact mean 'Saviour' I find it a misleading translation here: it is his proper name, and it is never given in the Blickling Homilies.

identification and repudiation.’ Moreover, ‘while “the Jew” continues to occupy a largely ambivalent and even imaginative space in Anglo-Saxon texts, the “chosen” Old Testament Hebrew provided a potent and malleable model for Christian and English self-identification’, additional to Germanic models.²⁷⁹ Linking Christ to David, therefore, does not make him any less relevant to the Anglo-Saxon audience of the homily. Christ also calls himself the Son of Man. He is shown to be omniscient, but also compassionate and merciful. According to the Blickling homilist, the Saviour spoke to his disciples about his future pain in order to reassure them, so that they would not be too troubled by his captivity, and he gave them the promised resurrection as a comfort. However, unconfirmed by the Holy Spirit, the disciples could not yet understand this. Christ’s miracles, for which he used his divine power, are the basis for faith in him, and it is for this reason he performed them before human witnesses. The blind man represented humanity in darkness, and ‘Drihten þa, þurh his tocyme, pysne middangeard onlyhte’.²⁸⁰ The Saviour restoring sight shows God’s concern for our vulnerability and the restoration of the Heavenly Light, which was abandoned by our ancestors. This physical healing and restoration of sight is immediately symbolic of Christ’s spiritual intentions and purpose, trying to bring humanity back to its pre-fall status. ‘Ond forðon God to us niþer asta[h]g þe he wolde, þæt we wæron upahafene to his godcundnesse’.²⁸¹ The imagery of begging at the roadside is appropriate as it is next to Christ, the ‘weg soðfæstnesse’,²⁸² and symbolises prayer for eternal light. While Christ particularly reveals his divinity in this context, his walking on the road makes him seem a lot more human than in most of the Blickling homilies. Through his coming, and miracles, he revealed his divinity and God’s involvement in human lives.

The homilist ponders the significance of the incarnation:

Gehyraþ we nu þæt seo mennisce gecynd biþ a færende, ond seo godcunde meht a stapolfæstlice stondeþ. Hwæt hæfde seo godcunde þurh þa menniscan nemne? Buton þæt heo mihte beon acenned, ond wacian [...]. þære godcundnesse nænig onwendnesse on carcerne wæs of þære menniscan gecynde, na las of þære godcundan miht. He bið a wesende ond æghwær ondweard, ond ælce stowe he gefylþ, ond ufan

²⁷⁹ Zacher, ‘Chosen People’, pp. 458 and 474.

²⁸⁰ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 10 and 13, ‘Our Lord, by His coming, illuminated the world again’.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ‘God, therefore, descended to us because He desired that we be elevated to His divine nature’.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, ‘way of truth’.

oferwryhþ, ond a biþ ece. Pæt tacnaþ þæt he, þurh þa menniscan gecynd, ure stefne blindnesse gehyreþ.²⁸³

Again, the homilist focuses on Christ's ever present divinity, but it is in his humanity that He will be compassionate. In essence, God is no less God for becoming human, and while confined to human form was nonetheless still everywhere and eternal.

A brief account of salvation history is given, starting with the beginning of the world, when the Lord created angels, Heaven, the earth and sea, and all creatures, but also 'Ealle stowa he gefylleþ ond ymbfehþ ond neoþan underwreþeþ, ond æghwar he biþ ondweard'.²⁸⁴ Thus, the period of Creation is not at an end, and it may be inferred that other 'original' things, such as sin, are also ongoing. The reason for our exile is that the progenitor of the human race betrayed God's commands. Christ humbled himself for our needs and became human, the form of his creation. He chose poor parents, who were nonetheless still of a royal line. He disregarded the world's wealth and bore the scorn of the Jews, enduring torture and crucifixion for our salvation. As God took on human form, we also need to be more like him, with sacrifices to offer him at Doomsday. Primarily, we need to observe God's commands, be penitent, and pray to the Lord to protect us from eternal death, and lead us to his glory and perpetual bliss. God is merciful and has done what he can for our salvation, but like the blind man we need to ask for his help. The homilist says Christ wants humankind to pray, to express their needs and desires, which is why He asked the blind man what he wanted. We should have our minds on spiritual matters in our prayers, asking for eternal life, as that is what will matter when the Lord comes again at Doomsday, at which point the body will be immortalized. Dalbey considers that the Quinquagesima homily accentuates the greatness of Christ's power and glory, and the importance of the deeds he performed for mankind. It stresses that we are favoured above all, because Christ, in the likeness of God, and coeternal, took on our weak nature. By dwelling on Christ's majesty, the homilist prepares the audience for the actions they must perform to follow Christ's example. Dalbey notes that there is a vast difference between the humanity of the listener and Christ's divinity.²⁸⁵ Jesus in the gospel is part of the same plan and story as the Creator God, though it is not explicit in this text that

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 'Let us comprehend that human nature is constantly ongoing and that divine power stands always firm. What did the divine form achieve by passing through human nature? It is the wonder of being born, being able to move, [...]... [y]et there was no change either of the divine nature or of the divine power during its confinement in human nature'... 'He who is eternal and omnipresent fills every place, understands all things, and is always eternal. This signifies that He, through his humanity, listens to the voice of our blindness'.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15, 'He fills, comprehends and sustains all places – He is everywhere present'.

²⁸⁵ Dalbey, 'Themes and Techniques', pp. 223-4.

Christ is the means of Creation. His humility is particularly emphasised in contrast to his divinity, and on the whole this is one of the most human representations of Christ in this collection.

III Dominica Prima in Quadragesima

This homily marks the official beginning of Lent. The pericope for the first Sunday of Lent is Matthew 4.1-11. In this text the Saviour is led into the wilderness and, having fasted for forty days and nights, is tempted by the devil. The devil tries to make him prove his identity, always starting ‘Gif þu sy Godes sunu...’.²⁸⁶ Christ returns him several spiritual maxims from the Old Testament, for example that you should live on the word from the mouth of God; you should not tempt the Lord your God; you must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone. An unusual interpretation is that ‘genam hine se awygda gast’, and later the devil ‘hine þa genam þriddan siþe’, both of which almost make Jesus sound spiritually possessed.²⁸⁷ After the devil departed, the Saviour was looked after by angels.

The Blickling homily is missing a leaf which would have included a discussion on the text, as pointed out by Dalbey.²⁸⁸ The main source has again been identified as Gregory’s *Dominica Prima in Quadragesima*, though other sources are apparent.²⁸⁹ The homily uses the same sources as Ælfric’s on the same subject, linking Lent to Christ’s fasting before the passion, which is anagogically linked to Doomsday.²⁹⁰ While the text is about temptation, the focus of the homily is on tithing. The homily insists that fasting must be accompanied by good deeds, as ‘Se mildheorta Drihten, ure Scyppend, onfehþ swiþe lustfullice eallum þæm godum þe ænig man gedep his þæm nehstan of arfæstre heortan ond mildre’.²⁹¹ Dalbey argues that Christ is depicted as the leader of the Christian army, as in the Palm Sunday homily, and because he overcame temptation, we are given the strength to do the same. If we follow his example as conqueror he will be loving and merciful, and Christ’s depiction moves from ‘se Ælmihtiga’ to ‘se mildheorta Drihten’ as above, with a shift in emphasis from the powerful Christ who overthrew the devil to the merciful Creator who sees our good deeds and receives

²⁸⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 18-9, ‘If you are the Son of God...’

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ‘the accursed spirit took hold of Him’, ‘took possession of Him a third time’.

²⁸⁸ Dalbey, ‘Textual Crux’, p. 243.

²⁸⁹ Wright, in ‘Blickling Homily III on the Temptations in the Desert’, pp. 130-3, argues that this homily has a patchwork of sources, some unidentified, but Jerome’s and Ambrose’s commentaries are particularly important. There is a possibility of Irish influence, with parallels in Hiberno-Latin commentaries.

²⁹⁰ Treharne, ‘Life and Times’, p. 220.

²⁹¹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 24-5, ‘The merciful Lord, our Creator, joyfully receives all good deeds that one does to one’s neighbour when from a pious and merciful heart they come’.

us into Heaven. These two aspects are present throughout the Lenten homilies.²⁹² Kelly points out that in this homily Lent is explained, incorrectly, as being, besides Sundays, a duration of 36 days, which would be a tithe of the year (36 is approximately a tenth of 365 days).²⁹³ The principle is, however, a good one, drawing together the ideas of giving both a tithe of your wealth, and your time, as is noted by Jeffrey. She also points out that the homilist praises Christ's enjoyment of material goods.²⁹⁴ Triads come up frequently in the first part of the homily, which is overall in three sections: the Holy Trinity is at Christ's baptism; he goes to the wilderness for three reasons; the devil tempts him three times. Jeffrey also suggests there are three types and antitypes of spiritual language in Christ's exchange with the devil. Christ is sinless, which is why the devil is outside his body, rather than within as with most humans.²⁹⁵

The homilist performs exegesis on the pericope, mainly tropological, but with relevant typology hammered home. The Lord immediately fasted after being baptised, which is implied to be in preparation for the Passion, as Lent occurs before the celebration of the Passion. The homily tells us that the Holy Fathers and others have shown that 'se egeslica Domesdæg cymeþ on þa tid þe Godes sunu on rode galgan þrowode',²⁹⁶ and it seems thus sensible to prepare as much as possible, as one cannot know when the end will come. We are reminded that the Lord admonishes us that we should serve him by fasting and works and so overcome the devil, and gain eternal life: 'se Ælmihtiga, se þe wæs on Godes hiwe, God Fæder efenece, onfeng þæt hiw ure tyddran gecynde'.²⁹⁷ It is implied that he could have taken on the form of other creatures, if there were others to be saved, and so highlights the uniqueness of humanity. Whatever good we do 'cumap of þæm æsprenge Godes mildheortnesse, ond beoð atogen of þæm mægene þære Halgan Þrynesse'.²⁹⁸ Christ's presence, therefore, is not only in his person, but in any good that can be seen, such as in the lives of the saints. The homilist insists that we must believe that the Saviour went into the wilderness willingly and was not compelled or constrained to do so: this reflects Adam being banished to the wilderness, and reminds that Christ is the second Adam. Christ went in order

²⁹² Dalbey, 'Themes and Techniques', pp. 225-7.

²⁹³ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 169.

²⁹⁴ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 47.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

²⁹⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 18-19, 'the fearful Doomsday will occur around the same time as the Son of God did suffer upon the Rood'.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 'The Almighty, being in the likeness of God and co-eternal with God the Father, took upon Himself the form of our frail nature'.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 'comes from the fountain of God's mercy and springs from the power of the Holy Trinity'.

to contest with the accursed spirit. He did this for three reasons: to invite the devil to challenge him, to liberate Adam from his long banishment; and to show mankind that the devil contends with those he sees inclining to God. The homilist explains that Christ is known as the Son of God because of the Father's voice at his baptism, as at Mark 1.11.

The evil spirit is described as perverse, offering to give earthly kingdoms to the 'hean cininge ond þæm heofonlican',²⁹⁹ who is, of course, described in several homilies as being greater than all creation. The devil wished for Christ to worship him, but the homilist again highlights the ridiculousness of this for someone 'þe stigeþ ofer þa þrymsetl heofona rices, ond his fotsceamul is þis eorþlice rice'.³⁰⁰ Christ overcame Satan through his use of scripture, likened by the homilist to David defeating Goliath with one stone. This comparison seems slightly out of place, as the homilist has just been establishing how much greater Christ is than the devil, whereas the story of David and Goliath rather highlights the power of those in whom God resides, even if apparently weak: not inaccurate in this context, but perhaps not best suited. Also, the devil is shown by the homilist not to understand the scriptures properly, as when he tells Christ to throw himself down to be rescued, we are told 'þis næs gecweden be Criste þæt his fot æt stane oþspurne, ah be halgum monnum',³⁰¹ because angels would protect them.

The Lord, whom we are told to praise, had decreed and ordained before all worlds, that he 'wolde mid his Suna lichoman þysne middangeard alysan fram deofles anwalde',³⁰² as the temptation in the desert foreshadows, and '[p]urh Cristes sige ealle halige wæron gefreolsode, þa þe him þeowiaþ on rihtwisnesse ond on halignesse'.³⁰³ Christ is both humble and infinitely giving, again expressed through typology: 'nis þæt nan wundor þeah se hea Cyning ond se eca Drihten hine sylfne let lædon on þa hean dune, se hine sylfne forlet from deofles leomum, ond from yflum mannum beon on rode ahangenne'.³⁰⁴ He overcame our temptation by his, and our death by his death. In his temptation, as later in his death, the Lord did not wish to manifest his power: though he could have caused the tempter to sink into

²⁹⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 20-1, 'exalted and Heavenly King'.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 'who ascended the Heavenly Kingdom and whose footstool is the earthly kingdom'.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 'It is not said concerning Christ that His foot should strike against a stone, but with regard to holy men'.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 'would by means of His Son's body deliver this world from the devil's might'.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 'through Christ's victory all holy men, who serve Him in righteousness and in holiness, were liberated'.

³⁰⁴ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 22-3, 'it is not stupendous that the high King and the eternal Lord permitted Himself to be led up to the high hill, since He allowed Himself to be nailed to the Rood by the limbs of the devil and of evil men'.

Hell, he instead triumphed with words of scripture, giving gentle replies to the devil. His patience sets us an example, and we must bear in mind God's longsuffering. Christ, through his patience in not destroying the devil immediately, intended to be of greater renown. The unity and eternity of God is highlighted: 'Se ilca Sunu wæs ær eallum tidum acenned from God Fæder, se Ælmihtiga from þon Ælmihtigan, ond se Eca from þan Ecan.'³⁰⁵ His power is always eternal, and his kingdom never destroyed. Christ is the fulfilment of prophecy: the prophets said that a man born of Judah would rule over all the nations. His two natures are manifested: 'he wæs soþ man, þy hine dorste deofol costian; swylce he wæs soþ God, þe him englas þegnodon'.³⁰⁶ In him we can see our frail nature, our humanity, but the homilist exhorts us to worship the Lord's divinity, in order to see one day the saints 'ond þa fægeran onsyne ures Scyppendes',³⁰⁷ for if He were not true God above all creatures, angels would not have attended him.

This exegetical passage is one of the most Christological of the Blickling homilies, going into detail about Christ's motivations, who he is and what he signifies. While the homily overall is intended to strengthen people in their resolve to do good in preparation for Easter, this opening makes a strong argument for how small a thing is asked, when Christ himself gave so much. In terms of worship, it is interesting to note again that Christ's divinity and humanity are separated out, and while it is in his humanity that he saves us, it is his divinity that should be worshipped.

IV Dominica Tertia in Quadragesima

This homily is mostly instructional, and as Willard noted it is based on Caesarius of Arles' tithing text *De Reddendis Decimis* in the first and third sections, and the *Visio Pauli* in the middle, and, as Acker suggests, at the very end. The material is handled freely by the Old English translator. The Junius manuscript has virtually the same homily, though through a transmission independent of the Blickling manuscript.³⁰⁸ Biblical texts used are from Exodus, Leviticus and Malachi, and there is a brief analogue with Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*.³⁰⁹ Dalbey argues that while Caesarius assumes the audience needs harsh

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1, 'The selfsame Son was before all time begotten of God the Father, the Almighty from the Almighty and the eternal from the eternal.'

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3, 'He was true man, so the devil dared to tempt him; he was also true God, as the angels tended to him.'

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5, 'and the fair countenance of our Creator.'

³⁰⁸ Willard, 'Tithing Homily', pp. 66-7; Acker, 'Going Out', p. 1.

³⁰⁹ Atherton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 4 (Cameron C.B.3.2.14)', *Fontes*
http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/data/content/astexts/src_summary.asp?refer=C%2EB%2E3%2E2%2E14

admonition, and emphasises the futility of leaving legacies, the Blickling homilist is less severe, removing any accusation, and making only a mild comment on the infidelity of earthly friends, and the transitoriness of earthly wealth.³¹⁰

According to Kelly, Caesarius's text was originally for the harvest season, which would not yet have started in England and has been awkwardly adapted to a Lenten setting.³¹¹ He notes that while tithing had always been an important part of the church, it was unsystematic until the time of Charlemagne,³¹² and Willard says it was not enforced by civil legislation in England until the tenth century, making a homily a suitable place to discuss the practice.³¹³ Unlike the other Lenten texts so far, this homily is not exegetical. The middle section discusses good clerical practice, showing that it is designed for a mixed audience, as tithing would have been more directed to those who had personal income.

The homily says we must thank the Lord for his fruits, and be mindful of Christ's request of tithing. As the Lord humbled himself to give all the fruit the earth produces, so we are commanded in the twelfth month to distribute a tenth for his sake. He does not need it himself, but 'he wolde ægbær ge ofer heofenum, ge ofer eorþan, us his miltse gecyþon'.³¹⁴ Paul says we must give appropriate goods sincerely, so that 'gefylleþ Drihten eower beren mid genihtsumnesse'.³¹⁵ However, if you doubt the reward for your alms, they will not benefit you. The last section of the homily returns again to tithing. Those who do not tithe will not be given God's mercy or absolution, and will be afflicted with punishments and deprived of all goods after their death. If we deny the tithe God will take nine parts, 'Gif we þonne bliþe ond rummodlice hi dælan willaþ earmum mannum, þonne ontyneþ us Drihten heofenes þeotan'.³¹⁶ We need to remember that everything is God's. He is more precious than all worldly riches. We are foolish to love earthly wealth, and not love God who gave it. As many poor people die due to not having been given tithes, a wealthy individual will be guilty of these deaths before the eternal Judge.

The second part of the homily, for clerics, says that in order to obtain God's mercy and forgiveness, bishops must 'þrafian þa mæssepreostas, mid lufe ge mid laþe, þæt hie

³¹⁰ Dalbey, 'Hortatory Tone', pp. 654-5.

³¹¹ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 170.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

³¹³ Willard, 'Tithing Homily', p. 70.

³¹⁴ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 26-7, 'He would show us His mercy both in Heaven and on earth'.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 'the Lord will then fill your storehouse with plenty'.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3, 'But if we will distribute our riches cheerfully and generously to the destitute, the Lord will open for us the fountains of Heaven.'

healdan Godes æwe on riht',³¹⁷ as well as the community and laity. St Paul said that 'Crist sylfa bebude Moyse þæt he oþrum lareowum sægde, gif hi þæt Cristene folc mid lufan ne mehton gecyrron þæt hi Godes æwe on riht geheoldan, þæt hi þonne manige yfele men mid heora feore gebohtan',³¹⁸ so that the remaining folk would turn to true service. Both bishops and mass-priests must minister to God's people and pray for them, as it is God's will. They will receive a greater reward as the faithful are very dear to God. Paul says we must bless ourselves with Christ's Rood and please God, in which case the devil will flee as he is terribly frightened of the Rood. All Christians should bless themselves seven times daily with Christ's cross, and teachers will be guilty before God if they do not impart this to their congregations.

This homily, lacking a direct reference to any gospel text, focuses more on God than it does on Christ, and because of this is quite impersonal. However, God is shown as both generous, giving everything, and immensely valuable in himself: he is well worth the value of tithes, in what could be seen as an early example of a prosperity doctrine. Tithing is not generous, but required, and without it God will not provide salvation. Thus, God is exacting, though tithing is portrayed as being reasonable, giving to the poor from what we have been generously given. Thematically this has overtones of the parable of the unforgiving servant at Matthew 18.21-25. The middle section of the homily also focuses on responsibility, following Christ's commands and leading his people correctly. Part of this teaching focuses on the ritualistic act of the sign of the cross, highlighting its potency as a symbol, and what it represents. This is Christ's most significant role in this homily.

V Dominica V in Quadragesima

The theme of this homily is the resurrection and new life, and tithing again plays a major part. The gospel for this day is John 8.46-59, in which the Jews accuse Jesus of having a devil in him. Jesus tells them he is glorified not by himself, but by the Father, and also says that he had existed before Abraham. This is the final day on which passages from John are read, leading up to the arrest and condemnation of Christ.³¹⁹ Several patristic sources are also drawn upon, including Basil's *Admonitio ad Filium Spiritualem*, an *ubi sunt* passage.³²⁰ Remarkably little is said about Christ in this homily, with his passion presented not just as an

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9, 'compel the priests with love or with fear to correctly preserve God's law'.

³¹⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 30-1, 'Christ himself commanded Moses to say to other teachers if they could not by love convert Christian people to observe God's law correctly that many men should pay the penalty with their lives'.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³²⁰ McCord, 'Probable Source', p. 360.

object of contemplation, but also as a programme of Christian living. There is no dissimulation from Christ, who reveals his identity: 'He makes the great claim that He is one with the Father, and that he is the Son of God'.³²¹ These words evoke fury in his enemies and faith in others.³²²

The homilist says that as the body cannot live without food and drink, 'swa þonne seo saul, gif heo ne bið mid Godes worde feded gastlice, hungre ond þurste heo bið cwelmed'.³²³ The word is, of course, scripture, but John's gospel also begins by describing God as *Logos*, the Word made flesh. Therefore this draws together closely the two main foci of the mass, with spiritual feeding through both types of 'the Word', the scripture and the Eucharist, spiritually Christ's body.³²⁴ Christ's life on earth, without which there would neither be the gospels nor the institution of the eucharist, brought about essential nourishment for us. In the gospel, Christ will not pay heed to the prayers of the careless and forgetful, but God dwells with his saints in Heaven, those who presumably paid attention and followed Christ's commands. This is how it should be, as men were first created in the image of God for eternal life, not for eternal death. At Judgement, the attractiveness of the body will have gone. Christ will grant forgiveness to those who desire and deserve it. For one of the most Christological of the pericopes in the Blickling Homilies, the homilist has remarkably little to say about Christ here. Christ is aware of his identity as both God and Son of God, and he provides sustenance for his people, who must follow his commands in order to be as he intended and eventually go to Heaven.

VI Palm Sunday

This homily marks the conclusion of the Lenten period in the Blickling Book, and indicates the transition into a more intense period before Easter. The interest in apocryphal material and pastoral duties suggest it was composed before the Benedictine reform, but later adaptations of the text, supplementing Ælfrician manuscripts, show that demand for the material did not die out.³²⁵ As well as running over the events of Palm Sunday, this homily gives a summary of Holy Week, for which Palm Sunday is ideally placed, with a general

³²¹ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 174.

³²² *Ibid.*.

³²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9, 'similarly the soul, if she is not spiritually fed with God's word, will also expire through hunger and thirst'.

³²⁴ Though the doctrine of transubstantiation had not yet been fully established, the eucharist had always been considered Christ's body, whether physically or spiritually, following 'hoc est corpus meum', 'this is my body', at Luke 22.19.

³²⁵ Lees, 'Blickling Palm Sunday', p. 11.

congregation present in the church. This corresponds with Ælfric's notion that there should be no preaching throughout Holy Week, leading to his coverage of the week also on Palm Sunday.³²⁶ As pointed out above, the feast of Pascha celebrates both the death and resurrection of Christ. Palm Sunday occurs the Sunday previous to this, and so its text covers the week up to the point from which Pascha continues. Covering so much, it is the longest exegetical homily in the Blickling *temporale*.³²⁷ Kelly has not identified a definite source for this homily,³²⁸ and Clare Lees considers it a confusing composite work, saying '[t]he employment of traditional material without strict derivation from sources accounts not only for the unfocussed nature of the homilist's exegesis, but also for his outright inaccuracies.'³²⁹ Typological associations are given priority over moral exposition. The homilist uses conventional Holy Week material but in a chaotic structure, with its body unconnected and reflecting little of the theme of redemption addressed at the beginning and end.³³⁰ Jeffrey describes the structure of this homily as unique, moving from verse to gloss without any systematic order of patristic allegoresis. She argues that the glossing is a sort of folk exegesis, with etymologies, number symbolism and digressive thinking.³³¹ The fulfilment of prophecy is at the heart of the homily, with a true identification of Christ looking both backwards and forwards.

The homilist aims to describe the holy time when 'se mildheorta Drihten ond se Alysend pysses menniscan cynnes hine sylfne geeapmedde þæt of hehþe þæs fæderlican þrymmes to eorþan astag'.³³² He would suffer for the salvation of men; he would release us from the devil's bondage; he made known his power and will; with a fearless mind he came to the place he would suffer for our redemption and the defeat of the devil. On this day, Palm Sunday, 'ure Drihten Hælend wæs weorþod ond hered from Iudea folce, forþon þe hie ongeaton þæt he wæs Hælend Crist þurh þæt wundorgeweorc'³³³ when he had raised Lazarus from the dead, six days before the 'Iudea eastum'.³³⁴ They laid out palm branches, as 'hit wæs Iudisc þeaw, þonne heora ciningas hæfdon sige geworht on heora feondum ond hie

³²⁶ See *Catholic Homilies* I.14 and II.14.

³²⁷ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 54.

³²⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 175.

³²⁹ Lees, 'Blickling Palm Sunday', p. 9.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³³¹ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 55.

³³² Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 46-7, 'the merciful Lord and the Redeemer of humankind so humbled Himself that he came from the glory of the paternal splendour to this earth.'

³³³ *Ibid.*, 'our Lord was honoured and praised by the Jewish people because they perceived that He was Christ the Saviour through that miraculous act.'

³³⁴ 'Jewish Easter'. The use of 'Hælend', though commonplace, emphasises that the physical healing he did for Lazarus is a type for spiritual salvation.

wæron eft ham hweorfende’,³³⁵ so it was appropriate that it was done for the Lord, the King of Glory. His greater kingship is emphasised when the homilist speaks of Judas, whom he says ‘gesealde wiþ feo heofones Hlaford ond ealles middangeardes’.³³⁶ It was a victorious day when he fulfilled the prophecies and ‘Drihten gesigefæsted wiþstod deofle, þa he mid his deaþe þone ecan deaþ oferswiþde’,³³⁷ and he greatly hurt Hell when he descended and harrowed it. Here, Christ is seen in triumph, again as a king, or even a military leader.

When the homilist goes on to speak of the passion, he informs his congregation that Christ suffered physical death for the redemption of men. The holy men who before Christ believed, loved and spoke of his coming were redeemed from Hell by the passion, and saved by the resurrection. We who come after know that he will judge and end the world, so we must believe in him and love him, in order to be found ready and earn eternal rest, so as to rejoice in angelic bliss with the Lord. The divine presence has not departed, for Christ said, ‘Symle ge me habbaþ mid geleaffullum mannum ondweardne þurh þone mægenþrym minre godcund[n]esse’.³³⁸ This is made more specific, as the homilist continues that the poor have Christ in their hearts, and are destined for eternal reward, and also that many believers acquire Christ through baptism and through the true belief in Christ’s sacrifice at the altar. The homilist exhorts the audience to follow Christ’s example in righteous deeds. Through this, the homilist reminds his congregation of the relevance of the events of Holy Week for them, and makes clearer that they are part of the same group of people as those who had come before Christ, showing chronology not to be of great importance.

Unlike in most of the Blickling homilies, here Christ is very active in the narrative, casting out the merchants and money-changers from the temple, and healing the blind and crippled. The fulfilment of prophecy is mentioned when Christ sends two disciples to collect an ass and foal from a village, so that he might arrive on a donkey. The multitude address him, saying ‘Hælend, Dauides Sunu, þu eart gebletsad on Drihtnes naman, hæl us on heanessum’,³³⁹ and ‘Hit is se Nadzarenisca witga of Galileum, se sceal beon gehered ofor

³³⁵ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 46-7, ‘it was a Jewish custom when their kings had gained victory over their adversaries and were returning home again.’

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9, ‘exchanged for money the Lord of Heaven and of the entire world’. This portrayal of Judas emphasises Christ’s Lordship, in a way that might be found in Old English poetry: the betrayal for money of a gift-giver is folly, as well as socially unacceptable.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7, ‘the triumphant Lord withstood the devil when He by his death overcame the eternal death’.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3, ‘You have me always present among believers through the glory of my divine nature’.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9, ‘Jesus, Son of David, blessed are you in the name of the Lord, save us on high’.

ealle þeoda ond geweorþod ge of cilda muþe meolcsucendra'.³⁴⁰ Though they honour him highly, it is in earthly terms they can identify with, linking him with David and his hometown, and only faintly associating him with Heaven.

The homilist engages in some complex typology and numerology, saying that the fact that Jesus was at Bethany six days before Easter signifies that it is the sixth age of the world, and that he manifested various works in the six days before his passion: first, he raised Lazarus from the dead, and was acknowledged king; second, he cursed the fruitless fig tree for being sinful; third, he told the apostles he would be handed over; fourth, he was anointed with ointment; fifth, he washed the feet of his apostles at the Last Supper; sixth, 'Iudeas hine ahengan on rode þær his blod ageat for ure hæle, ond us alesde of deofles þeowdome'.³⁴¹ The homilist goes no further with this material, from an unidentified source, and while some of the events are certainly the fulfilment of prophecy, others seem relatively insignificant in the scale of the events leading up to the Passion.

The ass signifies the Israelites and others subjected to God, worthy to bear the King of Heaven in their hearts. The crowd in front of Jesus also represent the Jewish people, including the patriarchs, Christ's forerunners. The crowd behind signifies those converted to faith in God. It is apparently fitting that Jesus Christ went to Bethphage, which signifies the holy church of servants, before Jerusalem, as 'he of heofenum to eorþan cwom, þæt he wolde þrowian for þis mennisce cynn, ond þære tide nealæhte ure alesnesse'.³⁴² Christ is condemnatory of Jerusalem, foreseeing its future sacking: he calls it a 'wic', or 'village', because the citizens are vile to him because of their unbelief and wickedness. In fact, it rather seems that he brings about the sacking, as the homily later says that he waited for the Jews to repent for forty winters before he had the city destroyed. Titus brought it all to ruin because of 'Godes wræce'.³⁴³ The tension between knowing what will be, and giving people a chance to change this, is apparent.

Lazarus represents the corrupt world, and the weight of death signifies the burden of sins. Martha signifies the holy church, receiving Christ to tend to his needs. Mary, with the oils, symbolises life. Both make God present in them. Mary, listening to the Saviour, stands

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9, 'It is the Nazarene prophet from Galilee, who should be praised among all nations and honoured also by the mouths of milk-sucking children'.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, 'the Jews affixed and hanged Him on the Rood where He shed His blood for our salvation and rescued us from the devil's bondage'.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3, 'He who had come from Heaven to earth would now suffer for humankind, and make nigh the time of our redemption'.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5, 'the vengeance of God'.

for the holy church in the future world, liberated from labour, with sight of the Heavenly Majesty, abiding in the presence of the Lord and perpetually praising him. We should imitate Mary, by doing good work and living correctly. ‘Þonne fylge we Drihtnes swæpe, þæt is gif we oþre men teala læreþ, ond hie be urum larum rihtlice for Gode libbaþ’.³⁴⁴

In sum, the Blickling Homily for Palm Sunday reveals the truth of who Christ is as the fulfilment of prophecy, and with other illustrations being offered through typology it instructs us in how we ought to act in order to be received in Heaven, along with the prophets and those who believed in Christ before his incarnation.

Summary

The Lenten homilies are based on richly descriptive biblical texts, and build on these to depict a detailed and interesting image of Christ. His role in the Lenten season is the fulfilment of scripture, and his relationship to God is shown clearly, while his role on earth is also revealed. The authors of the homilies do not tend to analyse Christ too deeply, and where they do they tend towards conventional attitudes, with nothing too risqué or unorthodox.

The Rogationtide Homilies

There are three homilies for the days of rogation, which occur after Easter. As Dalbey points out, they focus on sinfulness, the need for prayer, and the hope of Heaven.³⁴⁵ Like the Lenten season, Rogationtide is a time of penance, and of intercession and prayer. In Anglo-Saxon England, these days were known as ‘gangdagas’, as noted by Kelly, that is, days for going in procession to say litanies.³⁴⁶ None of these homilies have pericopes and so lack exegesis, focusing more on themes of atonement and redemption. Jeffrey emphasises the theme of Christ as the head and humans members of the body throughout these homilies, with the body needing to be cleansed, so that it can be received into Christ’s body at the resurrection.³⁴⁷ Dalbey says the Blickling Rogation homilies combine traditional hortatory topoi in a way that indicates the psychological function of the material and a good understanding of its most effective use and arrangement. There is an especial awareness of man’s sinfulness and the

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, ‘We follow the Lord’s footsteps if we teach other men well and they, as a result of our teaching, live in God’s ways’.

³⁴⁵ Dalbey, ‘Soul’s Medicine’, p. 470.

³⁴⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 179.

³⁴⁷ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, pp. 70-1.

need for prayer, and a contemplation of heavenly things. Good works alone are not enough for salvation, but the fear of Judgement is a distance incentive, with the importance placed on seeing sin as repulsive. The homilies offer both Heaven, and a model for our actions, and as we are aware of the human and divine in us, we are impelled to imitate Christ.³⁴⁸

VIII Rogation Monday

This text was originally untitled, and its sources are unknown.³⁴⁹ It focuses on Christ's redemption. The homilist says there is much need to remember that the Lord redeemed us from the devil's power by his passion, when he ascended the Rood, and shed his precious blood for our salvation. We should honour the 'halige sigetacen Cristes rode'.³⁵⁰ Christ endured suffering to save us from eternal torment and led us to eternal happiness. We need to obey God's commands, and seek remedy for our souls, as the Lord is very merciful. This is the crux of the message, as the point of Rogationtide is to be penitent in order to merit the acknowledged redemption. Christ's suffering had a point to it, making it worthwhile, and so, it is implied, does any suffering undergone in penance. On the whole, there is a very positive focus on Christ's gracious act: 'He þonne gecyrde to us, þa he hider becom of his Fæder rice, ond hine ungyrede þæs godcundan mægenþrymmes, ond gegyrede hine þeowlice mid þære menniscan tyderne'.³⁵¹ Though humanity has forsaken the Creator, he invites them to eternal life. The Lord does not desire the death of a sinner but that they turn to God, who will grant forgiveness. He will free us from the devil's luring if we are humble, and he never abandons the meek or gentle of heart. The Lord will joyfully repay man for good things, done with good will, with eternal life. The homilist does, not, however, fail to warn that we will stand before the throne of God at Doomsday, 'se cumeþ nu ungeara',³⁵² though no timeframe is set. He will recount our good and evil deeds and we will be appropriately rewarded. This is the stick to drive towards atonement, but is not heavily dwelt upon.

The homily argues that Christ showed the greatest love and mercy when he suffered a physical death and redeemed humanity. The chosen ones in Hell were already waiting for him, and he delivered us all from the devil's flames at the passion. Only those who heedlessly forsake God's commands go to Hell now. It is impossible to count the mercies and love that God has shown mankind. He only asks us to return our bodies at Doomsday as undefiled as

³⁴⁸ Dalbey, 'Soul's Medicine', pp. 470-2, 475.

³⁴⁹ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 179.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9, 'holy victory-sign of Christ's Cross'.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1, 'He turned to us when He came forth from His Father's kingdom and divested Himself of the divine majesty and invested Himself humbly with human frailty'.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 'which comes now suddenly'.

when they were created. We must be mindful of God's commands, the requirements of the soul, and thank him for his mercies, humility and gifts, and reverence his name with words and deeds, serving him. We will then behold his glorious countenance in perpetual peace. This reflects, therefore, mercy tempered with accountability. It is a very generous attitude, but nonetheless gives a strong reason to do as God wishes, in order to benefit from his mercy. The homilist concludes with stock dogma, saying that Christ is the light of the world, and lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

IX Rogation Tuesday

Only a short fragment of this homily remains, with as many as nine leaves lost, but other versions exist, including one in the Vercelli Book.³⁵³ What is left contains some interesting Christological content. Of this homily, Dalbey says that 'its picture of Christ is clear. He is extolled as the glorious savior [sic] of mankind... [w]ho opened up the kingdom of Heaven to men exiled from paradise because of Adam's sin.' The audience is invited to replace a loathing of sin with love of Christ, who can strengthen the fight against temptation. Fear leads to self-annihilation, which leads to hope, and 'negative judgements are appeased by love of God when he sees that Christ humbled Himself to exalt mankind.' It promises a future union with God, which has already been made real by Christ's first coming when he took flesh, and by reliving the union in the Eucharist.³⁵⁴ Chetwynd observes that in the background of this homily is the Augustinian idea of depraved human nature, unable to remove itself from sin without God's help. This is part of a set of assumptions, for instance that Christ, through conquering the devil, empowered humanity to do the same. It does not suggest that Christ weakened the devil, but enabled an increase in the freedom of human response to the devil.³⁵⁵ Beyond these analyses, it is worth a brief look at its image of Christ.

The homilist says that the Lord came in order to make intercession for us, as was discussed and foretold by the patriarchs and prophets. They said he would come from the throne of the glorious kingdom into this world, and would possess all kingdoms. This was fulfilled: the Heavens opened, and the supreme power descended to earth, the Holy Spirit in the noble womb. We were saved through the delivery, and redeemed through the birth. Whether the homilist means this as two different concepts, or merely as parallels, is unclear. The delivery focuses on Mary's role, and presumably on pain, so counters the responsibility

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁵⁴ Dalbey, 'Soul's Medicine', p. 475.

³⁵⁵ Chetwynd, 'Nu Nellap', p. 153.

of Eve for original sin, and emphasises the punishment she received (pain in childbirth). Salvation, or healing, comes through this, and the homilist later says that before the incarnation we were orphans, deprived of the Heavenly Kingdom. Redemption, the 'buying back' of humanity is specifically brought about by Christ coming to earth, in order to die for our sakes and give himself to the devil as our purchase price. This phrase, therefore, is potentially more loaded than it seems. We were liberated from the devils, and through Christ's coming we were privileged, enriched and honoured. The Lord Christ dwelled among men, and showed miracles and mercy when he healed. The Almighty God made them see and comprehend, and opened their ears to mercy and belief. Christ lives and reigns with all holy souls forever.

The two major aspects of this are Christ as fulfilment of the prophecies, and a description of his incarnation. Mary's womb is again described as a treasure house, in which the Holy Spirit dwelt. A number of his titles and functions are referred to, as the true Creator and Comforter of all people, the Saviour of the world, the Protector of all spirits, the Help of all souls. Interestingly, having received a human body from Mary, Christ is called 'goldbloma' meaning either 'Golden-Blossom' or 'Gold-Nugget': this title only occurs in this homily, and in an identical phrase in the Rogation Tuesday homily edited by Napier.³⁵⁶ Perhaps this is an analogy to Christ as *fructus ventris tui*, fruit of [Mary's] womb, or otherwise is another image of Christ as a treasure. His coming has helped and liberated humanity, helping them to understand better and therefore hopefully regain Heaven.

X Rogation Wednesday

This homily is concerned with the end of the world, which gives it a sense of urgency.³⁵⁷ It provides an immediate call to reform.³⁵⁸ It teaches that correct faith leads to good works, which result in redemption. Dietrich finds that the homily cannot be traced to apocrypha, but rather to the liturgical readings for Rogation Wednesday, the themes of which include God's willingness to grant mercy to those who ask for it, and the need to reclaim sinners from the death of sin.³⁵⁹ Bedingfield observes the influence of this homily on Ælfric's apocalyptic writing. He notes that Ælfric's orthodoxy makes him more cautious with apocryphal detail,

³⁵⁶ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp.74-5, and Napier, *Wulfstan*, pp. 250-65. Reference from a search on the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus/oecidx?index=Fragmentary&type=simple&q1=goldbloma&restrict=Cameron+number&resval=&class=All&size=First+100>

³⁵⁷ Dietrich, 'Liturgical Context', p. 138.

³⁵⁸ Ranum, 'Blickling Homily X', p. 43.

³⁵⁹ Dietrich, 'Liturgical Context', p. 138.

but the Blickling and Vercelli homilies are less restrained regarding the end of the world, and ‘poetic descriptions of the tortures of Hell or the signs of the End spring rather easily into the exhortative frame’. Occasionally, however, when Ælfric sees it as beneficial he borrows imaginative details from this homily and from Old English poetry, as well as from Gregory and Augustine. Fire is used differently depending on the author, but for the Blickling Homily it is pre-resurrection, where the fiery swords slay many people.³⁶⁰ The homily includes the traditional *ubi sunt* theme which is particularly characteristic of Old English poetry. It also has the resurrection of the dry bones motif, which while not directly relevant to my thesis is nonetheless interesting in this context, particularly compared to the homily on the Assumption.

The homilist calls for his congregation to turn immediately to the better so that God Almighty may be merciful, because the Lord desires that everyone be unblemished and whole, and turned to true wisdom. The end of the world is very near, and signs are apparent that Christ had mentioned to his disciples. The Final Reckoning is when the Almighty will bring this world to an end, and when ‘he his byrnsweord getyhþ ond þas world ealle þurhslyhþ, ond þa lichoman þurh sceoteð ond þysne middangeard tocleofeð’.³⁶¹ We should seek God’s mercy and live rightly before God, ‘on gesyhþe þæs hehstan Cyninges’.³⁶² We should be generous to the poor, as God commanded, and all are to praise God, not just those in positions of elevated service to him. We must make peace with God and humankind, confess true belief in God, the Lord Jesus Christ his begotten Son, the Holy Spirit, co-eternal with the Father. This develops into a creed. We should thank him, who is ‘þæm heofonlican Cininge þe leofað ond rixaþ on worlða world aa buton ende on ecnesse’,³⁶³ for his gifts and mercies. As with the other Rogationtide homilies, this one calls people to atone and draw closer to God, but it attempts to inspire fear far more than do the others. David is quoted: God will not despise those who fear their Creator, but will hear their prayers. The God portrayed here is the more judgemental God of the Old Testament, suitable for this reference to David, but at the same time the imagery is much in the spirit of the New Testament, particularly inspired by the Book of Revelation. Christ’s teachings must be followed, but here the emphasis is on one eternal God rather than three separate entities who have been involved in salvation history at different times.

³⁶⁰ Bedingfield, ‘Anglo-Saxons on Fire’, pp. 666, 675-6.

³⁶¹ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 78-9, ‘He will draw out His fiery sword and slash through this entire world and pierce the bodies and cleave the earth asunder’.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77, ‘in the sight of the highest King’.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-1, ‘the Heavenly King that lives and reigns everlasting’.

Summary

The Rogationtide homilies are penitential by nature, and it is here that the eschatology of the Blickling Homiliary comes out. Christ's suffering and death happened so that we would not have to go to Hell, and he has interceded for us so that we may be with him in Heaven, but he does still require a response from us. Here, more than elsewhere in this Book, the homilist is speaking to the people about themselves rather than events that happened before them, and Christ takes an active role in their salvation.

From Easter to Pentecost

The three other homilies in this collection are all feasts which are focused on the person of Christ, and are absolutely central to the doctrine and liturgy of the Church, namely Easter Sunday, Ascension Thursday and Pentecost. The feast for *Dominica Pascha* remembers both the death and resurrection of Christ, and focuses particularly on his role in redeeming the righteous from days gone by, waiting in Hell. Ascension Thursday highlights the divinity of the human Christ, as he is physically seen to return to Heaven. Pentecost celebrates Christ's promise, sending the Holy Spirit as a help to his followers when he is no longer physically with them himself. While these homilies are not a sequential group, due to the great significance of each one, they are linked by all focusing on Christ after he has died at the Passion.

VII Dominica Pascha

Dalbey regards this homily as particularly characteristic of this collection. It is based on apocryphal materials.³⁶⁴ This homily focuses not on the day of Easter, but on Christ's descent to Hell after his passion and death on the previous Friday, and on the Last Judgement, where Christ will judge mankind as relentlessly as he did the inhabitants of Hell.³⁶⁵ The two distinct traditions for Easter Sunday homilies are *Die Sancto Pascae* and *De Descensu Christi ad Inferos*.³⁶⁶ This homily speaks more of the passion than the resurrection, but Dalbey argues that even though it omits the crucifixion, it gives a real sense of the meaning of the Easter celebration, using a typological structure to highlight the relationship between prophecy and

³⁶⁴ Dalbey, 'Patterns of Preaching', p. 478.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

³⁶⁶ Ogawa, 'Language and Style', p. 203.

fulfilment.³⁶⁷ The story of the Lord's descent into Hell is taken from the Gospel of Nicodemus.³⁶⁸ The homily has a loose construction and idiosyncratic theology. While it does not make the most of its sources, it is structurally balanced and does progress.³⁶⁹ The introduction presents what Christ has done and will do, and moves from the acts and promises of Christ to the responsibilities of man, and the possibility of meriting salvation.³⁷⁰ Christ never speaks but acts, in order 'to portray Christ as an awesome, all-encompassing presence which is at the same time universal and personal'.³⁷¹ Scragg argues that later Old English Easter homilies were influenced by this one,³⁷² whereas Gatch believed the four Old English homilies were independent in their use of the *Apocalypse of Thomas*.³⁷³ Unlike the other three Old English homilies on the subject, this one omits most of the third day signs,³⁷⁴ which are used here to advance the miracles of salvation.³⁷⁵ Scragg discusses a separate text with parallel portrayals of the devil,³⁷⁶ and Ogawa notes that a later composite homily is both influenced by Ælfric and uses the same sources as this one.³⁷⁷

The homilist begins by warning us that we are not to doubt that the Creator will be in the Judgement seat, with all angels, humans and wicked spirits before him, and those who are mindful of the Lord's passion and resurrection will receive a heavenly reward, whereas those who neglect to follow God's commands or to remember the Lord's humility will receive a stern Judgement. Moreover, we should have joy at this time, because 'Drihten of d[eape] aras mancynne to bysene æfter his [þro]wunga, ond æfter þæm bendum his deapes, ond æfter þæm clammum helle þeostra'.³⁷⁸ He laid torment and misery on Satan, and liberated humankind. In the words of David, 'Ure Drihten us gefreolsode'.³⁷⁹ He revealed to men at this time all those things that were prophesied. He descended to earth by his own will, endured plots, and allowed his body to be fastened to the Rood with nails: 'ond deaþ he gebrowode for us, forþon þe he wolde us þæt ece lif forgifan'.³⁸⁰ He sent his 'wuldorfæstan

³⁶⁷ Dalbey, 'Patterns of Preaching', pp. 479 and 492.

³⁶⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, p. 176.

³⁶⁹ Dalbey, 'Patterns of Preaching', p. 479.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

³⁷² Scragg, 'Old English Harrowing', p. 283.

³⁷³ Gatch, 'Two Uses of Apocrypha', p. 383.

³⁷⁴ Wright, 'Apocalypse of Thomas', p. 41.

³⁷⁵ Gatch, 'Two Uses of Apocrypha', p. 382.

³⁷⁶ Scragg, 'Old English Harrowing', p. 283.

³⁷⁷ Ogawa, 'Language and Style', pp. 203 and 210.

³⁷⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 58-9, 'as an example to humankind, the Lord arose from the dead after His passion, after the bonds of His death, and after the fetters of Hell's darkness'.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Our Lord delivered us'.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 'He endured death for us because He wanted to grant us eternal life'.

gast'³⁸¹ into Hell, and bound and humbled the prince of darkness and eternal death. Those who were in Hell were frightened of him, and He led his chosen out. His light was strong and bright and terrible, and the devils say 'Wene we sy þis se þe we wendon þæt þurh his deap us sceolde beon eall middangeard underþeoded'.³⁸² From the point of view of the demons, Satan made a terrible error. As everyone on earth died and came to Hell, he thought he controlled the world, but he did not know what would happen because of Christ's death. The devils ask 'Tohwon læddest þu þeosne freone ond unscyldigne hider? Nu he hafap on his hidercyme ealle scyldige forðemde ond gehynde'.³⁸³ The bound devil is thrown into the abyss by Christ. Of particular interest in this is the attitude of the devils, accusatory towards Satan, who in his error had caused them all great discomfort. He is called *ealdor*, usually a term reserved for Christ, and his failure suggests an inversion of Christ's good and true leadership of the ancient just. Christ's great patience is emphasised, coming down to earth and dying so that others might live. This focuses more on his descent as God than on his good and innocent life as a human, though that is what the devils are concerned with. Christ appears in Hell as a triumphant warrior, binding the devil and throwing him into the abyss.

The freedom of the prisoners is highlighted. With them all the wealth that the devil got from the beginning has been taken away: 'þurh Cristes rode is eal þin blis to unrotnesse geworden'.³⁸⁴ The righteous souls bowed to the Saviour, referring to the price he has paid, saying 'þu come to us, middangeardes Alysene'.³⁸⁵ They ask to be taken from Hell, and are raised out. Adam and Eve, however, are still fettered. Adam cries out for mercy and is released. Eve next acknowledges that God's judgements are virtuous, calling him 'scyld minre iugoþe', and 'arfæsta God',³⁸⁶ asking him for mercy. Emphasising his humanity, she links herself to Mary, and thus Christ to her in his humanity, saying 'þu wast þæt þu of minre dehter, Drihten, onwoce, ond þæt hire flæsc is of minum flæsce ond hire ban of minum banum'.³⁸⁷ He has mercy on her, and then 'Drihten, þa þa herehyhþ þe on helle genumen hæfde, raþe he lifgende ut eode of his byrgenne mid his agenre mihte aweht. Ond eft mid his unwemum lichoman hine gegurede, ond he hine his gingrum æteowde, forþon þe he wolde

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 'triumphant spirit'.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 'we think this is he through whose death we believe that the entire world should be subject to us'.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1, 'Why do you bring this noble and innocent One here? He has condemned and humiliated all the guilty by his coming hither'.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 'Through Christ's Rood all your joys have turned to grief'.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 'You came to us as Redeemer of the world'.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3, 'shield of my youth', 'Gracious God'.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 'You know that you were born of my daughter, Lord, and that her flesh comes from my flesh and her bones from my bones'.

ælcne tweon of heora heortum adon',³⁸⁸ by means of his wounds and scars. As in homily I, his human form seems to be a garment, to be put on when it is convenient to serve a purpose, but not profoundly affecting his identity. At the Ascension he returns to Heaven, and is at the right hand of God the Father. He was never absent from there, due to his divinity. 'Forþon he his godcundnesse nan wiht ne gewanode, þa he þone menniscan lichoman onfeng, ond us of deofles anwalde alesde'.³⁸⁹

The homilist says everyone should rejoice, because God's blood was shed for us, but 'Drihten for us geprowode, þa he us mid his blode abohte of helle hæftnede',³⁹⁰ and he will expect *handlean*, 'recompense', when he is on the throne of Judgement. This is in contrast to Ælfric, who speaks continually of *earnung* or 'merit', focusing more on effort than something solid to hand over with a quantifiable value. This is the only homiletic occurrence of *handlean*. We must be adorned with good deeds in order to be at the right hand of the Lord Saviour Christ. The Supreme Judge will require more from the richer and more powerful.

At Doomsday, God will not heed any man's repentance. Dalbey argues that at the Last Judgement, it is impossible to doubt Christ's divinity, the fulfilment of prophecies and the promise of salvation for mankind.³⁹¹ The homilist invokes the Lord to have mercy, and finishes with a brief look to the incarnation, saying that when he was born in Bethlehem he was praised by the ranks of angels. God's sacrifice and redemption, as illustrated above, frees humanity from the power of the devil, but his purchase requires a repayment through good deeds and praise and love of God. The unusual choice of word transforms this into a retainer giving something of value to his Lord, rather than attempting to earn his respect through deeds where the effort is more significant than the end result.

XI Ascension Thursday

This homily is one of the earliest datable pieces of creative writing in English, dated to 971 in its rubric, which provides the basis for the dating of the collection. This is not, however, thought to be the date of composition, which is generally presumed, like the rest of the collection, to be somewhat earlier, though Kelly does not suggest this.³⁹² Jeffrey suggests that

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 'the Lord, together with the spoils that He had taken in Hell, quickly went out alive from His grave, raised up by His own strength. He afterwards arrayed Himself in His immaculate body, and showed Himself to His followers because he wanted to remove every doubt from their hearts'.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Even though he took on a human body and redeemed us from the power of the devil, He never lessened His divinity'.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 'The Lord suffered for us when He ransomed us with His blood from the captivity of Hell'.

³⁹¹ Dalbey, 'Patterns of Preaching', p. 487.

³⁹² Kelly, in *Homilies*, p. 182.

the composition was probably in the mid-ninth century, slightly earlier than the Vercelli Book. At the very least it does set a date for the *terminus ante quem* of composition, and a *terminus post quem* of the compilation.³⁹³ Cross notes that besides the pericope of Acts 1.1-15, homilies by Smaragdus, Haymo and Bede are used as sources, and that a phrase from Gregory's homily XXIX about the consubstantiality of Christ as God and man is the basis of the first section. The miracles of the Ascension are a commonplace in Old English literature.³⁹⁴ Oetgen notes that none of the Old English Ascension homilies build from each other, though they show a shared tradition, which also comes through in Cynewulf's *Christ II*.³⁹⁵ Jeffrey argues that as this homily recapitulates many themes and images from other Blickling homilies, this one 'produces the full eschatological patterning of the Blickling *temporale*'.³⁹⁶

The homily speaks very positively about Christ's view of his humanity, saying 'ure Drihten Hælend Crist þa menniscan gecynd, þe he genam to his godcundnesse ahefen him sylfum ofor heofonas ond ofor ealle engla þreatas, he eft to þæm fæderlican setle eode, þonon he næfre onweg ne gewat, þurh his þa ecean godcundnesse'.³⁹⁷ It links together his resurrection at Easter and his next coming to earth, as the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, when he would confirm the apostles: the Lord Christ previously appeared to His holy people after this resurrection, and spoke with them about God's kingdom and the promise of the Holy Spirit's future coming. After Pentecost, the homilist says the apostles were animated with fear and love of the Almighty Lord through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which God had sent from Heaven, and would become witnesses of the Lord. They divided the world into twelve parts so that each 'þurh Godes gife'³⁹⁸ and by their teaching gained many nations for the Lord. This is illustrated in the saints' lives in this collection, all of them except Peter and Paul based in a separate city. The homily also reminds of Christ's role outside of time, when he warns his apostles that only the Father knows the time of the fulfilment of the kingdom of Israel, highlighting the omniscience of the divine over humanity. Nonetheless the homilist claims to know it is not far off, as all of the signs and warnings have happened, except for the

³⁹³ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 2.

³⁹⁴ Cross, 'Ascension Day', pp. 230 and 235.

³⁹⁵ Oetgen, 'Common Motifs', p. 437.

³⁹⁶ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 79.

³⁹⁷ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 82-3, 'our Lord and Saviour Christ exalted above the Heavens and all the hosts of angels the humanity He enjoined to His divine nature when he went to the dwelling of His Father, from which, because of His eternal Godhead, He had never departed'.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5, 'by the grace of God'.

coming of the Antichrist, and the sixth age has now mostly passed. This is based upon prophetic readings of the Book of Revelation.

The sight of the Ascension is described at some length, with Christ shown as the absolute protagonist, though with need of the clouds in order to ascend: ‘Oppe þæt wolcn hiene up ahofe, ah he þæt wolcn him beforan nam, swa he ealle gesceafta on his handa hafað. Ond ealle þurh his godcunde meht ond þurh his ecean snyttro æfter his willan recep ond stihtaþ’.³⁹⁹ He disappeared into the cloud and Heaven, just as on Doomsday he will come back with his angels upon a cloud, again in his body. This link to Doomsday is further developed: the homilist continues that

se ilca Drihten þe us nu ær mid ealre eaþmodnesse hider on middangeard gesohte in menniscum lichoman, ond he ealle eaþmodnessem ond eal geþyld, ond ealle mildheortnesse wiþ mancynn gecyþde. Se ilca us þonne wile nu hwonne eft on þa nehstan tid þisse worlde on Domesdæg mid eallum egesan gesecean, ond þonne æghwylcum anum men gyldan ond leanigean æfter his sylfes weorcum ond dædum.⁴⁰⁰

We should pray, as we do not know the term of life the Lord will grant us on earth, and we must be prepared for when the Lord visits. The apocalyptic theme keeps the Ascension relevant: Christ has not ascended, never again to be involved in the earth or to mind what happens, but will be reckoning what happens on earth for all time.

At the Ascension, the angels in Heaven were happier than ever, because ‘hie þone heora Scyppend gesegon, ond þone soþan Cyning Ælmihtigne God ealra gesceafta mid þære menniscan gecynd to þæm fæderlican setle ahafenne, þonon he næfre ne gewat þurh his þa ecean godcundnesse’.⁴⁰¹ This implies that the angels are happier than when God had been in Heaven, before taking on humanity for himself, and saving humankind. All people should praise and glorify the Creator for the favours and privileges that Almighty God has bestowed. ‘Ond þa ilcan menniscan gecynd þe he þæt ær þurh eornesse swa to cwæþ, þa ilcan he ure

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5, ‘The cloud did not lift Him up, but He took the cloud before Him because all creation is in His hands. He orders and disposes all phenomena according to His purpose by His divine power and by His eternal wisdom’.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7, ‘[t]he Lord previously visited us here on earth with all humility in a human body, and displayed to humankind all modesty, patience and mercy. The same Lord will later at the final moments of this world on Doomsday visit us with all fearsome awe, and will at that same time repay and reward every man according to his works and deeds.’

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-7, ‘they saw Almighty God, their Creator and the true King of all creatures, exalted to the paternal abode together with His human nature, from whence by reason of His eternal divinity He has never departed’.

Drihten on þas halgan tid on him sylfum ahof, ofer heofonas ond ofer ealle engla þreatas'.⁴⁰² This exaltation in the re-elevation of humanity shows the purity of these heavenly angels, as they do not show the envy which resulted in the Fall of their kin, even though they are by implication of Christ's ascension now lower than humankind.

There is still a physical reminder of the Ascension at its site, where the homilist claims there are still miracles. The marks of Christ's footprints are there, as 'Forlet he ure Drihten his þa halgan fet þær on þa eorþan besincan'⁴⁰³ as an everlasting reminder of his passion, human nature, and the Godhead in Heaven. In a final summary, the balance between Christ's divinity and humanity is explained yet again: in his humility, he visited us from his throne and made people understand their own lives better. By his own volition 'he for ealles mancynnes hæle mid his sylfes willan deaþ geprowode, þeah his þære ecean godcundnesse nænig man sceþpan ne mihte, þæt þe þonne wæs efne xxxiii wintra'.⁴⁰⁴ He taught about eternal life, he rose from the dead and 'on þære stowe nehst lichomlice on stod her on eorþan, ær þon þe he þa menniscan gecynd upon heofenas gelædde'.⁴⁰⁵ As usual, this leads the homilist to instruct us that we should be good and charitable, and love and fear the Lord. The Ascension is told as a dramatic story of Christ's reunion with Heaven in both his human and divine forms, and foreshadows Christ's coming at the end of time. The joy of the angels should be reflected in the gratitude of humanity, who have benefitted from his Incarnation and Passion.

XII Pentecost Sunday

Though the particular source is unknown, this homily has 'thematic affinity' with Gregory the Great's *Die Sancto Pentecostes*, and is almost identical to Ælfric's first series homily. The feastday was originally a composite for both the Ascension and Pentecost, and the feast of Pentecost itself may originally have celebrated the Jewish wheat harvest. The homily draws attention to the purpose of the church to proclaim the gospel, with a missionary tone in its references to cleansing and the forgiveness of sin.⁴⁰⁶ Jeffrey points out that though the homily

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7 'The very human nature that He previously in His anger had denounced, our Lord exalted in Himself above Heaven and above all the company of angels at this holy time'.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9 'Our Lord let His holy feet sink into the ground'.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1 'of His own free will He suffered death for the salvation of humankind when He was just thirty-three years old, yet no one was able to impair His eternal Godhead'.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 'finally stood bodily here upon the earth on this holy place before He brought His human nature into Heaven'.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

is exegetical in format, it follows a range of different scriptural passages, from Psalms, John 14 and Acts 2.⁴⁰⁷

The premise for this homily is the longing of the disciples for their departed Lord. The Lord's Ascension occurred ten days before Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, who was sent from Heaven, having been promised to the apostles for their consolation, and 'to wedde þæs hoefonlican eþles', before 'he on heofenas astige, þonon he næfre won wæs þurh his godcundnesse miht'.⁴⁰⁸ The exalted majesty of the Godhead was ever with the angelic hosts, though it dwelt with us for a while. God, coming to earth, never left Heaven. Once having been to earth, he only left for a short time, saying 'Ne forlæte ic eow aldrlease, ac eow sende frofre Gast'.⁴⁰⁹ This happened because the Heavenly Father perceived that his children were troubled concerning his departure, and appropriately comforted them. The Holy Spirit taught every good thing, and prohibited every wicked thing. Christ's promise is reiterated: 'To eow cymeþ Halig frofre Gast, þone eow sendeð Fæder on minum naman. Se eow ealle þa þing læreþ to donne, þe ic eow foresægde þæt ge don sceoldon æfter minum upstige'.⁴¹⁰ The Holy Spirit inspired all the things the holy men wrote under the new and old law, which suggests that though especially sent by Christ, it was already present.

David is quoted, saying 'Forþlæteþ wind of his goldhordum, se is waldend windes ond goldes',⁴¹¹ an unusual description, almost a mixed metaphor, for the Holy Spirit coming from Christ. Wind is of course one of the signs of the Holy Spirit, but the treasure-hoard is far more Germanic than it is biblical, though it could, potentially, refer to 2 Corinthians 12, where Christ is described as a treasure: 'Habemus autem thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus ut sublimitas sit virtutis Dei et non ex nobis'.⁴¹² Even if Christ might be described as a 'treasure-hoard', 'ruler of wealth' seems anachronistic.

The apostles became filled with the teachings of the Gospel, which were sown and strewn. The Lord's Spirit descended upon the earth in the likeness of a dove. The Spirit is thus in the wind, the Word, and the dove, and now is described as fire: 'Forþon þe he wæs ealra fyrena leas, þe fyr clænsian sceolde, þonne wæs se Halga Gast ahafen ofer þa Godes

⁴⁰⁷ Jeffrey, *Blickling Spirituality*, p. 87.

⁴⁰⁸ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 92-3, 'as a pledge of the Heavenly Kingdom', 'He ascended into Heaven from whence through the power of the Godhead he never departed'.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 'I will not leave you without a leader because I will send you the Comforting Spirit'.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 'To you will come the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send you in my name. He will teach you to do all those things that I have foretold you that you should do after my ascension'.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5, 'He who is the Ruler of wind and of wealth sends forth the wind from his treasure-hoard'.

⁴¹² 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God and not of us.'

leorneras on anlicnesse fyrenra legea'.⁴¹³ Having been cleansed of sin, they would immediately go to eternal life. They were also able to cleanse the sins of others, and the Holy Spirit would strengthen them in their love of their Lord. These flames are almost purgatorial, and correspond with the homily for Rogation Wednesday, in which, as Bedingfield notes, the fire comes before the resurrection of the dead at the end of the world.⁴¹⁴ God desired the apostles to overcome the accursed spirits through the Holy Spirit. Though most of these descriptors are specifically for the Holy Spirit, rather than Christ, it is worth noting how comprehensively the homilist tries to use the common terms available.

The homilist acknowledges Christ's self-awareness of his importance to his disciples, in '[s]e Hælend wiste þæt his gingran woldan unrote beon for his framfundunga, forþon þe he wæs se leofa Lareow, ond eac ealles middangeardes Scyppend'.⁴¹⁵ Like the inhabitants of Heaven, they had been obedient to him. Christ told them not to be troubled, as he would intercede with the Father for them. Indeed, 'him ne wæs nænig earfoþe þæt lichomlice gedal on þære neowan wyrde',⁴¹⁶ having received the Spirit. The Saviour had said 'Ic eow sende frofre Gast', which the homilist defines as meaning 'þingere' or 'frefrend'.⁴¹⁷ Through the 'heofonlican fultomes',⁴¹⁸ that is, the Holy Spirit, and through God's assistance they could accomplish anything. While the homily is more about the strengthening of the apostles than anything else, the nature and role of Christ, sending the Holy Spirit, is explored, and again focuses on his compassion. In his personal relationship with his followers he saw their need to have him with them. There is more concern for the apostles being troubled at the loss of their friend and teacher, than the practical level of them being unable to carry out their work because of fear.

Summary

These homilies show both Christ's cosmological role, and the importance of his incarnation in his plan for the redemption of humankind. They remember three of the greatest feasts of the Church so it is not surprising that Christ takes centre stage, and because they are such well-known texts the relative orthodoxy of this section might also be expected.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 'Because he was free of all crimes that fire could cleanse, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of God in the form of tongues of fire'.

⁴¹⁴ Bedingfield, 'Anglo-Saxons on Fire', p. 666.

⁴¹⁵ Kelly, *Homilies*, pp. 94-5, 'The Saviour knew the disciples would be sad at His leaving, as he was the beloved Teacher and Creator of the world'.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 'That bodily separation from Christ did not prove any difficulty to them in their new state'.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 'I will send the comforting Ghost', 'Advocate' or 'Comforter'.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Heavenly Help'.

Conclusions

The tone of the Blickling Homilies may be benevolent, but this is due more to the rhetoric of the authors than it is due to the content of the homilies. While Christ is depicted from infant to Risen Lord, through to Judge, it is rarely in a way that makes him someone to whom the audience can relate. He is wearing humanity, and his divinity is never allowed to be out of the thoughts of the audience. There are few ordinary stories from the scriptures, with all those that are included pointing to deeper mysteries and significance. Nonetheless, the focus of these homilies is on the whole process of Christ's redeeming act, with Judgement the final stage rather than the only incentive to do good. In its over-arching message, the Blickling Book is not unorthodox, although its details do let it down at times. The saints provide an important bridge between Christ enthroned and the audience, themselves showing many of the attributes that Christ displayed in the gospel texts. The aim of the compiler of the Blickling Book must have been to make relevant the seasons of the church, and through them the person of Christ. How effective this may have been is hard to tell, but as half of the collection is in circulation in other manuscripts it must be granted that the homilies of the Blickling Book were successful in the maintenance of the faith of their congregation.

CHAPTER III

ÆFTER HIS AGENUM GEWYRHTUM 7 GEEARNUNGUM: THE VERCELLI BOOK

Introduction

The Vercelli Manuscript

The Vercelli Book is a manuscript from late tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England, containing some twenty-three homilies, and six poems of religious matter, all of which are homiletic in style. With the Blickling Homiliary it is one of the earliest collections of Old English homilies, and it is the earliest extant collection of Old English poetry.⁴¹⁹ Also along with the Blickling Homilies, the homilies of the Vercelli Book have for a long time been regarded as among the heretical texts mentioned by Ælfric,⁴²⁰ and until fairly recently they received less critical attention than is their due. The early nineteenth-century binding described the Book as *Homiliarum liber ignoti idiomatis*, and it was not until 1822 that the language was identified as Old English.⁴²¹ In 1832 C. Maier travelled to Vercelli to make a transcription,⁴²² and the Vercelli Homilies became more widely known.⁴²³ The first full edition of the homilies was published in 1992, and this has made the homilies far more accessible.⁴²⁴ Scragg believes that ‘The Vercelli Book is the single most important piece of evidence in charting the early history of homiletic literature in English. It is, quite simply, the earliest book of homilies in any language other than Latin, and that makes it a very important manuscript indeed.’ It is the only surviving collection of homilies compiled before Wulfstan and Ælfric began their work, and thus is essential in the evidence of this earlier homiletic tradition.⁴²⁵

In recent years the work particularly of Don Scragg, Paul Szarmach and Samantha Zacher has given the collection much more of the consideration it deserves. Treharne suggests that the Vercelli Book has been isolated due to its lack of genre.⁴²⁶ She argues that it

⁴¹⁹ Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, p. 30.

⁴²⁰ Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies I*, Praefatio, p. 175.

⁴²¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. xxiv.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Some early studies are reviewed in Halsall, ‘Benjamin Thorpe and the Vercelli Book’, and Fell, ‘Richard Cleasby's Notes on the Vercelli Codex’

⁴²⁴ This edition by Scragg will be referred to throughout this chapter, but it is to be noted that it builds on the earlier work of Förster, *Die Vercelli-Homilien I-VIII*, Szarmach, *Vercelli Homilies IX-XXIII*; and Sisam, *The Vercelli Book*. Translations of the homilies are my own, or are from Nicholson, ed., *The Vercelli Book Homilies: Translations from the Anglo-Saxon*, with the individual translator cited.

⁴²⁵ Scragg, ‘Significance of the Vercelli Book’, pp. 37-8.

⁴²⁶ Treharne, ‘Form and Function’, pp. 259-60.

is not as anomalous as has been thought, but shows the spiritual and pastoral impulse of a major monastery in the early years of reform.⁴²⁷ Frantzen refutes the idea of the homilies as being unorthodox, arguing that neither the Blickling nor Vercelli homilies say anything about penance which should concern theologians.⁴²⁸ Scragg describes the homiletic tradition before Ælfric as ‘extraordinarily narrow’, with its few homilies frequently overlapping,⁴²⁹ and it is indeed true that the breadth of homiletic material in the Vercelli Book cannot be compared to Ælfric’s very wide-ranging collections. Nor is it as one with the other major anonymous collection, the Blickling Book, though they both rely on the Latin Fathers: ‘while the *Blickling Book* and the homilies of the *Vercelli Codex* represent the same general theological outlook certain differences arise between the two because of their collectors’ “variant purposes”’.⁴³⁰ Zacher speaks with glowing rhetoric of the codex: ‘[a]s the Vercelli Book poetry and prose together testify, such a skilful amalgamation of resources is precisely what appears to lend the surviving Old English literature its distinctive flavour, providing, as it does, a complex blend of what is old and new, native and imported, secular and Christian, and oral and written.’⁴³¹ As Zacher points out, earlier critical attention has focused on manuscript context and source study, with aesthetic and literary criteria not given high importance,⁴³² though Szarmach led the way with literary analysis over thirty years ago, arguing that ‘many homilies anticipate the structural and stylistic achievements found in the work of Ælfric and Wulfstan’.⁴³³ He has continued this, recently providing a ‘literary assessment’, allowing the homilies a literary history of composition and rewriting spanning a century.⁴³⁴ Szarmach was the first to examine the work of the Vercelli scribe, suggesting that there may be ‘some basis to arrive at an estimate of the scribe of the Vercelli Book as a mechanical, sometimes careless, scribe, if we measure his efforts in copying down the homilies he had before him, especially those that exist in other manuscripts’.⁴³⁵ The Vercelli Book has received a good deal of linguistic and philological attention, thanks in part to the

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁴²⁸ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 157.

⁴²⁹ Scragg, ‘Corpus of Vernacular Homilies’, p. 266.

⁴³⁰ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 117.

⁴³¹ Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, p. xxvii.

⁴³² Zacher, ‘Rereading’, p. 173.

⁴³³ Szarmach, ‘Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure’, p. 262.

⁴³⁴ Szarmach, ‘Vercelli Prose and Anglo-Saxon Literary History’, p. 19.

⁴³⁵ Szarmach, ‘Scribe of the Vercelli Book’, p. 179.

scribe's 'mechanical' copying of the various dialects in the texts before him.⁴³⁶ Unfortunately there are some lacunas, and parts of the manuscript are damaged by reagents.⁴³⁷

The book was probably not planned as a whole, as it is difficult to find a principle to its arrangement,⁴³⁸ so it is best considered as a *florilegium*. It is an original collection with no single precedent text,⁴³⁹ and its sources are likewise eclectic, though some authors, such as Caesarius of Arles, make a particularly strong standing.⁴⁴⁰ As variants of several of the homilies and poems exist in another two dozen manuscripts, the texts must have been popular.⁴⁴¹ The Vercelli Book itself contains repeated and overlapping prose texts, seemingly not noted by the scribe.⁴⁴² Much is uncertain about the collection: for instance, whether it was compiled pre- or post-Benedictine Reform, and whether it even represents vernacular preaching or is an adaptation of Carolingian Latin texts.⁴⁴³ The Vercelli manuscript is thought to be the collaborative work of a compiler, who selected the texts to go in as they came to hand, and despite the variation in script size,⁴⁴⁴ a single scribe, who lacked confidence in Latin,⁴⁴⁵ though the language shows a variety of linguistic forms.⁴⁴⁶ Of the scribe, Scragg says that 'for the most part, V copied mechanically, and in doing so preserved invaluable linguistic material through his exemplars'.⁴⁴⁷ Robinson has suggested that the Vercelli Book may have been composed in 'booklet' form, initially kept separate rather than within one binding.⁴⁴⁸ It exists in three blocks of quires.⁴⁴⁹ The manuscript is likely to have been produced in Kent, probably at St Augustine's in Canterbury.⁴⁵⁰ The age of the homilies is

⁴³⁶ Scragg, 'The Significance of the Vercelli Book', p. 42. Examples of linguistic studies include Pilch, 'The Last Vercelli Homily', and Goldman, 'Rhetoric and Transformational Analysis', Karasawa, 'OE *dream* for Horrible Noise'.

⁴³⁷ Szarmach, *Vercelli Homilies IX-XXIII*, p. xx.

⁴³⁸ Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', pp. 318 and 339.

⁴³⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. xx.

⁴⁴⁰ Szarmach, 'Caesarius of Arles and the Vercelli Homilies', p. 323. Caesarius influenced at least 7 homilies, with at least three of his sermons used on multiple occasions, with suitable penitential themes. I will discuss most sources in the context of the individual homilies.

⁴⁴¹ Zacher and Orchard, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁴⁴² Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', p. 319. For example, a version of Vercelli III is contained within Vercelli X.

⁴⁴³ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 166.

⁴⁴⁴ Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', p. 317.

⁴⁴⁵ Treharne, 'Form and Function', p. 258.

⁴⁴⁶ Scragg, 'Language of the Copyist', p. 41.

⁴⁴⁷ Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', p. 327.

⁴⁴⁸ Robinson, 'Self-Contained Units', pp. 236-7.

⁴⁴⁹ Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', p. 321.

⁴⁵⁰ Scragg, 'The Vercelli Homilies in Kent', pp. 369-80. In this article Scragg examines other manuscripts with copies of or extracts from the Vercelli homilies, in order to see how far they can be associated with South-East England. He concludes that as the homilies of the Vercelli Book appear far more frequently in other manuscripts than those of the Blickling Book, the library in Canterbury must have contained these materials for seventy-five years after the Vercelli Book was written, in order for them to have been copied so much.

uncertain, and Scragg points out that due to the late date of all Old English homiletic manuscripts, our knowledge of their development is limited, and there is no sure means of distinguishing tenth-century homilies from earlier ones.⁴⁵¹ This is particularly true when, as in the Vercelli Book, some homilies are much older than others. Treharne dates the Vercelli Book to before 975, based on the script.⁴⁵² On the basis of marginalia, Sisam argues that the manuscript probably went to Vercelli in the eleventh century, a time when there would have been many possible carriers.⁴⁵³ No single target readership has yet been identified for the Book,⁴⁵⁴ though Clayton suggests that the homilies may have been used for Mass or a similar context,⁴⁵⁵ or more likely it was a manuscript for private devotion,⁴⁵⁶ perhaps for a penitential pilgrim,⁴⁵⁷ as is suitable to the journey motif which McBrine has noted,⁴⁵⁸ or even a woman's book.⁴⁵⁹ If indeed it was taken on a pilgrimage, Gatch argues that it is not surprising for it to have been left in Italy.⁴⁶⁰ Haines suggests a public purpose for the collection, arguing that there is a deliberate focus on attention-grabbing dramatic speeches.⁴⁶¹ Whatever the original purpose of the collection, it seems convincing that it should have been taken on pilgrimage at some point, and there is no overwhelming reason for the compiler not to have selected dramatic scenes for the entertainment of the reader, even if the reading was private.

Selection and Organisation of Homilies

Because the texts of the Vercelli Book were copied according to convenience as exemplars came available, no liturgical order is strictly followed, and the compiler appears to enjoy the freedom to focus on what he pleases. Zacher likens the collection to a 'Greatest Hits',⁴⁶² and Treharne compares it to the composite homilies of the eleventh century.⁴⁶³ The homilies often contradict one another, but are set next to each other without question.⁴⁶⁴ As mentioned above, many of the homilies do appear in other collections, at variable degrees of remove from the Vercelli witnesses; moreover, the Vercelli book does not always provide the best

⁴⁵¹ Scragg, 'Corpus of Vernacular Homilies', p. 223.

⁴⁵² Treharne, 'Form and Function', p. 254.

⁴⁵³ Sisam, 'Marginalia in the Vercelli Book', pp. 113-7.

⁴⁵⁴ Zacher, 'Rereading', p. 173.

⁴⁵⁵ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 211.

⁴⁵⁶ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 172.

⁴⁵⁷ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 146.

⁴⁵⁸ McBrine, 'Journey Motif', p. 317.

⁴⁵⁹ Dockray-Miller, 'Female Devotion', pp. 337-90.

⁴⁶⁰ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 146.

⁴⁶¹ Haines, 'Courtroom Drama', p. 106.

⁴⁶² Zacher, 'Rereading', p. 173.

⁴⁶³ Treharne, 'Form and Function', p. 262.

⁴⁶⁴ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 155.

version.⁴⁶⁵ The Vercelli Book does, however, often display groupings of texts on particular themes, mostly carried over from the exemplars; for example, the three rubricated homilies, XI, XII and XIII, all for Rogationtide, almost certainly came from a single precedent. As there is a tropological bent to this collection, only two of the texts are in fact technical expository *homiliae*, with most either *sermones* or *vitae*.⁴⁶⁶ Some significant feasts are missing altogether, such as Easter and the Ascension.⁴⁶⁷ Though about half of the homilies are fittingly designated for Lent and Rogationtide, if not rubricated as such,⁴⁶⁸ themes are prioritised over seasons, with penance and eschatology foremost. The Vercelli manuscript is an important transitional collection in eschatological matters, with the setting of Judgement used to express interest in the purgatorial interim.⁴⁶⁹

Christ in the Homilies

With this move away from the church's liturgical year, the usual cycles of stories involving Christ's time on earth are largely absent. Gatch points out that '[e]xcept for his translation of the John passion and his treatment of Christmas and of Epiphany, then, the collector is not concerned with the life of our Lord'.⁴⁷⁰ For such a disparate collection, it is surprising that of all the collections of Anglo-Saxon homilies it is perhaps the Vercelli Book that portrays Christ in the most uniform way. This is perhaps due to the fact that the overall focus, as Gatch suggests, is on those who are judged, giving an obvious role to Christ,⁴⁷¹ and showing less concern about his deeds than ours.

The Vercelli Homilies do not exhibit a wide range of names for Christ. Those which occur with high frequency are mostly standard, indicating power and authority, such as *cyning*, *dema*, *dryhten*, *ealdor*, *God*, *lareow*, *scippend*, *wealdend*,⁴⁷² as well as the members of the Trinity, *fæder*, *Christ*, *hælend*, *sunu*, *halga gast*, and *ðrynes*,⁴⁷³ with common descriptors of God being *ælmihhtig*, *eadig*, *ece*.⁴⁷⁴ There is limited purpose in studying the lexicon of what may be a wide range of original authors, but it is noteworthy that power and

⁴⁶⁵ Scragg, 'Corpus of Vernacular Homilies', pp. 232-3.

⁴⁶⁶ Scragg, 'Vercelli Homilies', p. xix.

⁴⁶⁷ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 144.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁷² King, Judge, Lord, Parent, God, Teacher, Creator, Master.

⁴⁷³ Father, Christ, Saviour, Son, Holy Ghost, Trinity.

⁴⁷⁴ almighty, noble, eternal.

authority are key aspects of the portrayal of God, with few terms (*Christ, hælend, sunu*)⁴⁷⁵ used with any frequency to describe Christ himself.

The Vercelli homilies, like those of Wulfstan, are designed to exhort people to a better way of life, particularly through fear of Judgement. Their Christology reflects this: as noted above, there is little emphasis on depicting the life of Christ, nor even on the theological issues he presents or the morals he exemplifies, but instead he is overwhelmingly portrayed as a Judge. The only gospel texts to be discussed, the Nativity and Passion, are both used to emphasise God's plan and the fulfilment of prophecy far more than Christ's humanity. The collection lacks a clear presentation of the range of the church's doctrines. There is, of course, a good deal of variation between the homilies, and while Vercelli I focuses entirely on translating the account of Christ's Passion in John's gospel, in Vercelli XXIII Guthlac fights the demons with the assistance of Bartholomew, with God, rather than Christ, responding to his prayers for assistance. Below I will examine the homilies as arranged in loose categories, in order to establish common motifs and depictions of Christ, or more often a more generic Lord, and what this can tell us about the homilies of the Vercelli Book.

Vercelli Poetry

As noted above, the poetry and homilies of the Vercelli Book exhibit common themes and interests, and are mixed together, indicating that they were collected from a number of sources, and were selected specifically for their thematic material. Vercelli V precedes *Andreas* and Cynewulf's *The Fates of the Apostles*. Vercelli XVIII is followed by *Soul and Body I*, *Homiletic Fragment I* and *The Dream of the Rood*. The penultimate item in the collection is *Elene*. Three of these poems (*Elene*, *Andreas* and *The Fates of the Apostles*) are saints' lives. Two of the poems (*Elene* and *The Dream of the Rood*) focus on the importance of Christ's cross. *Soul and Body I* is particularly concerned with Christ in Judgement at Doomsday, and *Homiletic Fragment I* is likewise eschatological. All attempt to inspire their audiences to penance and atonement, in hope of a favourable judgement, using a mixture of role models, compunction and fear.

Despite the manuscript context, studies of the Vercelli Book poetic texts often all but ignore their homiletic context, and studies of the homilies do not regularly incorporate the poems. This is most apparent in the fact that they have been edited separately.⁴⁷⁶ Due to the

⁴⁷⁵ Christ, Saviour, Son.

⁴⁷⁶ See Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, for the standard edition of the poetry.

constraints of this thesis, I am giving the poetry only a brief examination, as the role of Christ in *Dream of the Rood*, for example, has already been thoroughly explored and does not need reiterating. Christ is in the background, never the forefront, of *Elene*, and does not appear in *Soul and Body I* or *Homiletic Fragment I* at all. *Soul and Body* is, however, analogous to several of the homilies and shows very strong images of Judgement Day. The boundaries between prose and poetry are hazy at best, and in such a mixed collection as this they are at times permeable, and the two genres are well worth considering together.

Eschatological Homilies

Introduction

Whilst Judgement is a major theme in much of the Vercelli book, there are a few homilies in which it is virtually the only Christological theme to come through. Yet again the focus is on the divinity of Christ enthroned, with little or no attention paid to his teachings and human ministry. In many senses Christ is a necessary backdrop to these Judgement scenes, but the focus of the homily is on those being judged. As Gatch put it, the ‘King of kings would reward his unswervingly loyal thanes and discharge those who failed to meet his standards and inaugurate a Kingdom unhampered by the disadvantages of mortality’.⁴⁷⁷ This suggests an Anglo-Saxon retainer-lord relationship, but what the homilies show does not always seem to reflect this with any particular closeness.

II. De Die Iudicii

Vercelli II is a simple exhortatory homily, entirely based on the theme of doomsday and the need for repentance. This homily survives only in the Vercelli Book, but was drawn upon in later composite homilies, and Napier XL expands lines 1-66 in a Wulfstanian style. It is short, eschatological and largely alliterative. There is no single Latin source, but Scragg considers most of the horrors described to be standard for exhortatory homilies of the time.⁴⁷⁸ Vercelli II warns of the terrors of Doomsday, and the folly of people who presume that the Lord will not come to judge. Matthew’s vision of the return of the Son of Man is twice mentioned.⁴⁷⁹ He will be terrifying, but majestic, appearing both as when he was crucified, and in great glory: whilst the sinful will see his wounded aspect, the holy will see him unwounded. This

⁴⁷⁷ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 165.

⁴⁷⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 48.

⁴⁷⁹ Gatch, ‘Eschatology’, p. 154.

image occurs again in Vercelli XV. It implies that his apparent physical state is directly reflective of the spiritual state of the people, whom He will judge according to their works. Because the wretched will have performed the work of the devil, not of the Creator, they will grieve to see him, and then go to Hell. The homilist calls his congregation to atonement, to love the Lord, and to be merciful so that the Lord might also be merciful. We are exhorted to remember his redemptive acts, and that they can be fulfilled, releasing us from slavery to the devil, through our humility and mercy. The Antichrist makes one of his few appearances in the Vercelli Book, here identified with the devil, the tormentor of the Last Judgement.⁴⁸⁰ In a final warning, the homilist says we need to remember our souls' needs now, as what we earn lasts for eternity. Christ, the Judge at Doomsday, is shown to be just, and merciful, though frightening. He should be an object of love. While he is shown in glory and is co-eternal with God, his human suffering is highlighted, particularly in the view of sinners, who literally see a different side to Christ from those who followed his will. The sinners would effectively receive the message that they themselves caused the wounds. Christ shows their role in bringing about his suffering, and the suffering that they themselves will undergo due to the pain they have caused.

IV.

Vercelli IV is a body and soul homily, for which no Latin source has been found. It may be a composite itself,⁴⁸¹ and was also used by the homily compilers of the eleventh century. It survives in one other version,⁴⁸² and its introduction overlaps with the 'Macarius' homily, a composite soul and body text.⁴⁸³ The homily is an exhortation to compare this world with the next and repent, with a list of sinners who will be damned, a description of Hell, and doomsday drawing near. The doomsday section is 'one of the most dramatic and successful of all addresses of the soul to the body in Old English literature'.⁴⁸⁴ This homily's value has long been recognised. Hall has recently called it 'one of the most complex and original eschatological texts in Old English', and the most extraordinary commentary on the fate of the soul in Old English;⁴⁸⁵ similarly, in 1935, Willard lauded this homily as the most fully developed description of the Judgement of the soul at the Last Day to exist in Old English.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁸¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 89.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁸³ Wright, 'The Old English "Macarius" Homily', p. 211.

⁴⁸⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 88.

⁴⁸⁵ Hall, 'Psychedelic Transmogrification', pp. 311 and 314. Hall describes the body and soul as mirror images, both capable of intellect and reason.

⁴⁸⁶ Willard, 'Address of the Soul to the Body', p. 982.

He pointed out that this homily differs from the other half dozen Old English body and soul texts, and it is one of only two set at Judgement;⁴⁸⁷ others, for example, *Soul and Body I*, also in the Vercelli Book, seem to be set in the interim between death and Judgement.⁴⁸⁸ He also notes that it is unusual that here the righteous are judged first.⁴⁸⁹ Gatch points out that in this homily the attention is unusually on the judged, rather than the Judge,⁴⁹⁰ though this is fairly consistent throughout the Vercelli homilies. Hall also notes God's minor role, with the souls listing all the vices and virtues.⁴⁹¹ Willard identifies the *Visio Sancti Pauli* as a source,⁴⁹² and considers the shift of situation to Judgement natural, as 'it is the great end of the world, the backdrop against which all Christian thought is to be projected, and from which human conduct receives its meaning'.⁴⁹³ Wright has noted in the rhetoric of the homily affinities to *Solomon and Saturn*, though here the virtues of God are enumerated, rather than those of the Paternoster.⁴⁹⁴ Like Wright, Scragg acknowledges the text's rhetorical nature, with frequently repeated antithetical phrases.⁴⁹⁵ Haines suggests a performance by the preacher would have made this homily particularly dramatic and emotional for the congregation.⁴⁹⁶ The speeches of the soul and body are interjected by Christ, the angels and Satan. Christ's shields, or virtues, are enumerated in the Irish style as protection against the devil.⁴⁹⁷ Vercelli IV differentiates strongly between the attitude of the Lord to people in this world and in the next. While for now he is merciful, and hearing those who pray to him forgives them, he will be harsh and terrifying in the next world, giving people what they deserve, whether good or bad. God placed humanity on the earth between the angels and the devils (presumably both physically, with *middangeard* placed between Heaven and Hell, and spiritually, as we are not yet decided for good or evil), and created us wiser than the cattle. He gave us understanding to comprehend his will and salvation. The soul of the weak body condemns its body and blames it for everything, including treating its throat as the *Hælend Crist* and its belly as the *Drihten God*, suggesting false worship; conversely, the soul of the good body is full of its body's praise. The souls both recognise the Lord in his eternal rule, and in an appositive

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 979.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 973.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 975.

⁴⁹⁰ Gatch, 'Uses of Apocrypha', p. 387.

⁴⁹¹ Hall, 'Rhetorics of Salvation and Damnation', p. 143.

⁴⁹² Willard, 'Address of the Soul to the Body', p. 975.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 979.

⁴⁹⁴ Wright, *Irish Tradition*, p. 262.

⁴⁹⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 88.

⁴⁹⁶ Haines, 'Courtroom Drama', p. 113.

⁴⁹⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 89. See further in Wright, *Irish Tradition*, particularly ch. 2 'The "enumerative style" in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England'.

series describes him as ‘lifes wyrhta’, ‘lofsang eallra haligra’, hiht heofendra’, ‘eallre worulde hælend’, ‘geswencedra manna rest’, blindra manna leoht’, ‘dumra gesprec’, ‘deafra gehyrnes’, ‘hreoфра clænsung’, ‘healtra gang’, becoming more flowery in ‘eallre biternesse þu eart se sweta swæc’... ‘ðu eart se æðela wyll[a]’,⁴⁹⁸ essentially the right of all wrong. Everything should be offered to the Eternal Judge at Judgement. The Saviour will call the blessed; the Lord will judge according to the law and the unholy will be afraid of the ‘reðan cyninges word’:⁴⁹⁹ the Saviour will be terrible, asking why they delayed their good work. The soul derides the body for idolising itself, and the King sends the soul back into the body, described as a ruined house. The homily concludes with an indication of what the Lord does to help us, by providing shields against the devil, and a shepherd – presumably Christ, succeeded by the bishops - to protect us. Throughout, the Lord is primarily an object of fear, but this homily emphasises the responsibility given to humanity and their own role in deciding their afterlife, with the decision made before they even come to Christ enthroned. Whilst the Lord is called *Hælend*, he does not show characteristics pertaining particularly to the Son or the Father, as this is not relevant to the message of the homily.

Soul and Body I

Soul and Body I, though fragmentary, can be usefully compared to the more strictly homiletic soul and body texts such as the one just discussed. A more complete version of the poem, known as *Soul and Body II*, survives in the Exeter Book. As mentioned earlier, this poem seems to be set in the interim between life and death. It states that God has provided the spirit with either torment or glory for a long time – presumably in this interim, purgatorial, period – and when Almighty God, the ‘Ancenneda’⁵⁰⁰ ends the world, the soul of the wicked body will be ashamed, as it tells its body in the grave. On this day the Lord will wish to hear the deeds of each man, and the soul of the wicked body asks the body what it should say, also addressing the audience in this question. Typically, as the good body had fasted, and filled its soul with Christ’s body and the spiritual drink, it would rejoice together with its soul at Judgement. As in the prose homily, the Lord will be fearful at Judgement. The poem lacks the padding of the homily, and therefore has even less to say about Christ, far more relishing the speeches of the souls. It is specifically the begotten Son who ends the world, rather than

⁴⁹⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 97, ‘life’s Artificer’, ‘Hymn of all the saints’, ‘Hope of the lamenting’, ‘Saviour of all the world’, ‘Rest of afflicted men’, ‘Light of blind men’, ‘Speech of the dumb’, ‘Hearing of the deaf’, ‘Cleansing of lepers’, ‘Movement of the lame’, becoming more flowery in ‘You are the sweet taste to all bitterness’, ‘you are the noble desire’.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98, ‘fierce/just King’s word’.

⁵⁰⁰ l.50, ‘only-begotten’.

the Father, and the Eucharist, his body and blood, is what preserves the good soul. The poetic language is more specific, thereby making Christ's role in some ways clearer than it can be throughout the homilies where he is so often named with the vague *Dryhten*.

VIII.

Vercelli VIII is an eschatological homily based upon Christ's speech as judge, *Ego te, homo*, which is attributed to Caesarius's Sermon LVII, though the version used as the source here is not extant.⁵⁰¹ Vercelli VIII still exists in two other copies, and all three are dependent upon a faulty archetype. It begins by referring to Gregory's warning of the end of the world, and then moves on to a general penitential theme of confession.⁵⁰² There is what Scragg describes as a conventional depiction of doom, the torments of Hell, and Christ's reception of the blessed.⁵⁰³ Willard calls this homily a 'brief dramatic sermon on penance and the Last Judgement, intended for the first Sunday after Epiphany'.⁵⁰⁴ He also draw links between this homily and the poem *Christ III*, both indebted to Caesarius of Arles.⁵⁰⁵ It is in these two Old English texts, but not in Caesarius, that the Judge is represented as stating that after the Fall he had mercy on man, in order to explain his further activity after Creation, i.e. the Incarnation,⁵⁰⁶ perhaps to answer questions that were being asked, or because the authors did not have high opinions of their audiences' intellect. Raw describes this homily, along with *Christ III*, as the 'most dramatic' expressions of the theme of the crucifix as a reminder of Christ's suffering, love in redeeming mankind, and demanding gratitude in return: 'In these passages the two themes kept separate in the early church – the hope of Heaven and compassion for Christ's sufferings – come together'.⁵⁰⁷ Haines suggests that this both prefigures affective piety, and is implicitly Anglo-Saxon through the legal idea of Christ being uncompensated. In this homily, Christ takes on the role of both Judge and plaintiff, making his speech to the accused particularly effective.⁵⁰⁸ Christ briefly narrates everything he had gone through to receive human form, highlighting the intimate relationship between Creator and creature, with man's fall an outrage against this.⁵⁰⁹ In a rather unusual premise, Vercelli VIII says that Christ suffered because he wished for us to be ready when He ends this life. Presumably this means

⁵⁰¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 139.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵⁰⁴ Willard, 'Vercelli VIII and *Christ*', p. 314.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁵⁰⁷ Raw, *Crucifixion*, pp. 65-6.

⁵⁰⁸ Haines, 'Courtroom Drama', p. 115.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

that the possibility of our salvation would be available to us, and also that through compunction regarding his suffering we should be drawn to behave better. Whilst this is perhaps ‘affective’ piety as suggested by Haines, it is certainly coming from the same world as *Dream of the Rood* where the suffering of Christ draws deep feeling and is an inspiration to be closer to him spiritually, and therefore to be more likely to emulate him and be with him in eternity. Yet, the predominant focus is again on the Last Judgement. The Son of Man will come in glory and judge ‘æfter his agenum gewyrhtum 7 geearnungum’...’ge æfter hyra sylfra gewyrhtum’, according to his mercy.⁵¹⁰ The inclusion of Christ’s deeds lifts the bar considerably, because if Christ is comparing people to himself, he is comparing to the most perfect self-giving, which is impossible to match. Yet, the implication is that this is the *more* merciful outlook, compared to Caesarius where it is only the deeds of humankind, not mercy, that count.⁵¹¹ While he will be compassionate and merciful at Judgement, he should be feared by the guilty, whom he will punish with a terrible voice, speaking of their Creation and their disobedience, and he will send to Hell those who reject him. While, as a child, he came to show mercy, through his suffering, passion and harrowing, at Judgement he will want to know what has been done in return for this. He wants to have souls returned to him as pure as when they were given: they are his ‘yrfes’.⁵¹² He speaks of himself as ‘fæder’, ‘dryhten’, ‘freond’, not as Judge, and describes himself as ‘unawendedlic in minre godcundnesse’.⁵¹³ This is the most Christologically personal homily of the Vercelli Book, with Christ actually given the opportunity to explain his actions, motivations and desires. Both his mercy and justice are essential, and the infant Christ can be seen through the eyes of the divine Lord. Through his display of love and mercy, he draws the audience to him, though those faceless sinners and saints within the homily have already decided their fates.

IX.

Vercelli IX is an eschatological homily, for which no direct source has been identified. It has a complex textual history and is in a very corrupt state.⁵¹⁴ Much of the style has Hiberno-Latin connections,⁵¹⁵ and indeed, Wright describes it as an ‘ideal case study’ of the assimilation of Irish literary forms and learned traditions by an Anglo-Saxon author, in its free use of apocrypha (in this case, the *Visio Pauli*, developed through Irish tradition) and the

⁵¹⁰ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 144, ‘according to his own (i.e, Christ’s) works and merits’, ‘also according to their (the people’s) own works’.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 146, ‘inheritance’.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, ‘Father’, ‘Lord’, ‘Friend’, ‘unchangeable in my divinity’.

⁵¹⁴ Scragg, ‘Cotton Tiberius A’, p. 28.

⁵¹⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 152.

enumerative style.⁵¹⁶ The first half contains listed warnings of present signs of approaching doom. The second part describes the terror of Hell and the joy of Heaven, within the framework of a speech forced from a captive devil by an anchorite.⁵¹⁷ No Latin source is known for this, though the narrative occurs in several other texts,⁵¹⁸ of which this is the best version.⁵¹⁹ The structural centre of this homily, as for Vercelli X and XIX, is the narrative event performing the moral themes of the beginning of the homily.⁵²⁰ To reign in Heaven with ‘ure dryhten hælende Crist’⁵²¹ we need to earn it, and the overall drive of the homily is to encourage its audience to turn to God through alms and good works. In attempting to describe some aspects of Heaven the homily gives a striking depiction of God: ‘Ne þearf man næfre ne sunnan ne monan ne næniges eorðlices liohtes, for ðan þær is se ælmihtiga dryhten scinendra 7 liohtra þonne ealle oðre lioht.’⁵²² The association of the Lord with light is a commonplace, but this is the only time in the Old English homilies that I have seen it applied to Heaven, replacing the celestial orbs, and no source is attested by Scragg. It can, however, be traced to Revelation 21.23: ‘And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof’. The Lamb is not used at all as an image for Christ in the Vercelli Book, though it was favoured greatly by Bede in his sermons, and later used again by Ælfric. It may have been out of favour at this time, or more likely was better appreciated by the two great monastic writers. This section could also potentially be associated with light leaving the world at the moment of Christ’s death, though the Easter homily in this collection rather suggests that this is due to the sun’s shame: ‘sio sunne 7 ealle þa hefontungulu hira leoht betyndon 7 behyddon, þæt hie þ[æt] mo[rð]or geseon ne woldon þæt men her on eorþan wiðhira scyppend fremedon’.⁵²³ The focus of this homily is on what needs to be done by the congregation in order to go to Heaven, with the benefits, and the alternative, laid out to both attract and motivate. Christ is

⁵¹⁶ Wright, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 10, 21, 106, 49, also discussed in ‘The Irish “Enumerative Style”’.

⁵¹⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 151.

⁵¹⁸ Robinson, ‘Devil’s Account’, p. 364.

⁵¹⁹ Scragg, ‘Devil’s Account Revisited’, p. 108.

⁵²⁰ Szarmach, ‘Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure’, p. 249.

⁵²¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 160, ‘our Lord Saviour Christ’.

⁵²² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 178, ‘there one will not need the light of the sun or moon or any earthly light, because the Almighty Lord is more shining and light than all other light’.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 36, ‘The sun and all the stars of the Heavens shut up and hid their light, because they did not wish to see that violence, what men here on earth did to their Creator.’ I would also suggest here a comparison to Numbers 6.25, in both the Hebrew and in modern translations implying a shining coming from God’s face, such as in the New Jerusalem Bible, ‘May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you’, the Vulgate has ‘ostendat Dominus faciem suam tibi et misereatur tui’, translated by the Douay-Rheims Bible as ‘the Lord shew his face to thee, and have mercy on thee’, removing the element of light. Circulating versions of *Vetus Latina* texts may have corresponded more closely to the Hebrew.

only depicted in Heaven, and is thus the target of the homily, more so than the tool with which to get to the destination.

X.

Vercelli X is a highly regarded homily because of its prose style. It was formerly known as Napier XLIX, and it survives in nine copies, though some of these are just sections of the whole. It was probably composed by a single author, in English. The three sources identified by Wilcox are Paulinus of Aquileia's *Liber Exhortationis*, pseudo-Augustine's *Remedia Peccatorum*, and Isidore's *Synonyma*,⁵²⁴ from which, as Di Sciacca discusses, the *ubi sunt* topos of this homily is taken.⁵²⁵ Szarmach contends that the topos here is as effective as that in the *Wanderer*, calling the author the 'Vercelli Master'.⁵²⁶ Remly also links this homily to the apocryphal gospel of St James, attributing its use to an 'easy tolerance' in the tenth-century church in Anglo-Saxon England.⁵²⁷ Wilcox argues that in 'examining the treatment of these passages in the course of the transmission of a homily, it is possible to discover contemporary Anglo-Saxon attitudes to such heightened prose', and that the changes show the pleasure taken in Old English prose style.⁵²⁸ Zacher also focuses on this style, noting the concern for repetition and soundplay.⁵²⁹ Scragg considers the homily well constructed, with the sources supplying basic ideas which are expanded and redeveloped.⁵³⁰ The Vercelli version is the only one to open with a preamble on the spiritual value of attending to the gospel. It continues with an introduction on the Incarnation and salvation, with general advice to avoid damnation. No source is known for this, and it may have been composed as an introduction.⁵³¹ Szarmach identifies the Last Judgement scene with the devil as prosecutor, prompting the righteous Judge to send the accursed to Hell, as coming from Paulinus of Aquileia, as mentioned above. Satan's speech is imaginatively dramatised, though Christ's reply is paraphrased from Matthew 25.41,46.⁵³² Regarding the presentation of God, Szarmach suggests that in the scene with the rich man, the vindictive image of the Creator effectively

⁵²⁴ Wilcox, 'Variant Texts of an Old English Homily', p. 339.

⁵²⁵ Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, p. 123. She notes further in 'Ubi Sunt Motif', p. 367, that Old English literature contains the first vernacular witnesses of the soul and body motif in the west.

⁵²⁶ Szarmach, 'The Vercelli Prose and Anglo-Saxon Literary History', p. 37.

⁵²⁷ Remly, 'Salome in England', p. 121.

⁵²⁸ Wilcox, 'Variant Texts of an Old English Homily', p. 345.

⁵²⁹ Zacher, 'Sin, Syntax and Synonyms', p. 54.

⁵³⁰ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 192.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵³² *Ibid.*

complements the image of the devil seeking souls through justice.⁵³³ He explains that the homilist's

doctrinal biography of Christ stresses that men were step-children until the only-begotten Son appointed them for the joy of paradise. There is now a covenant between God and man, he says, which must be kept by the avoidance of sin. The idea of covenant or agreement implies in turn the question of compensation and judgement, should the agreement be broken.⁵³⁴

This 'covenant' implies that both sides of the agreement have obligations to fulfil, yet while Vercelli X emphasises the necessity of merit, it also displays the unimaginable beneficence of God, showing inequality between the two sides. God does not need to modify himself at all. Yet, whilst the covenant was arranged by only one side of the partnership, it was only to the benefit of the others. The pseudo-Augustine sermon is then adapted to make it more homiletically effective, concluding with an extension of Christ speaking directly to a rich man about his mistaken priorities as in Luke 12.20, but here the man dies at the end of Christ's speech.⁵³⁵ The continuing theme is the transience of earthly prosperity, concluded with the need for salvation and a reminder of Heaven. Vercelli X is a very mixed homily, in parts practical and at other times using unusual imagery to portray the Lord as a just Judge. To start with, the homilist reminds the congregation that the Lord is present whenever the gospel is told to even one man, and that the sins of both the teller and the hearer will be forgiven. The focus on biblical texts continues with the advent of the Lord described as the fulfilment of the patriarchs, prophets and psalmists, coming to earth from his throne in the realm of glory, and claiming kingly power. The Almighty Lord came into the world and took on a human body from Mary. He is described as 'þone soðan scyppend 7 ealles folces frefrend 7 ealles middangeardes hælend 7 ealra gasta nerigend 7 eallra sawla helpend'.⁵³⁶ Interestingly, Zacher points out that '[t]he agentive suffix *-end*, which appears no fewer than four times in the above passage, occurs in a string of epithets for God and Christ two further times in the homily', and though this is fairly common in poetry and prose, 'it is relatively rare to find such a diversity of titles contained in a single work. A few appear to have been

⁵³³ Szarmach, 'Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure', p. 246.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵³⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 192.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197, 'the true Creator and Comforter of all people and Saviour of all the earth and Preserver of all spirits and Aid of all souls'.

invented for the sake of the homily.⁵³⁷ Thus, the heightened rhetoric of this text does extend to the depiction of Christ. He healed through his mother – presumably, through his conception and incarnation – dwelt among humanity, gave peace and salvation, performed miracles and showed mercy. He illuminated the blind so they could perceive him, their help and salvation. Through this, he revealed his mercy, compassion and love, and incited them to faith. All these attributes show great care and love. The homilist asserts that we are no longer orphans, but have been claimed for Paradise by the true Creator, the living God, the born son, our Lord, referring back to his divine status. Nonetheless, the next scene to be described is Judgement, where he will judge truly. The devil makes an appearance at the Judgement scene. Zacher notes that both the devil and Christ are given roles as poets.⁵³⁸ Szarmach compares the music of the devil leading people away to the rhythmic prose of the homily which is calling them back.⁵³⁹ Heckman similarly argues that the devil’s song in this homily ‘strikes a blow at textual authority and the ministry of preaching’.⁵⁴⁰ He is ingratiating, calling to the ‘ealra gesceafta reccend 7 scippend 7 steorend’,⁵⁴¹ demanding fair judgement. He speaks of Christ humbling himself, giving up his life, going on the cross, pouring out his blood, and redeeming humanity, all due to his love, but mankind turning away. Thus, the devil is used to remind the audience of the mysteries of the incarnation. His speech has the effect he intends, or at least verbalises the reasoning of the Judge, who sends away those whom the devil condemns. Zacher argues that ‘[t]he devil is perhaps thus elevated in this manner because he is unusually depicted in the homily both as Christ’s adversary and as Christ’s advocate, in that he helps Christ to challenge the guilty’.⁵⁴² Haines suggests this is done perhaps for shock effect, speaking of Christ’s efforts in a way similar to Christ speaking to the sinner in VIII.⁵⁴³ This is the opposite of homily XV, in which Mary, Peter and Michael interject on behalf of humanity, pointing out everything that Christ has already done for them. Between the two, the power of intercession is emphasised, for good or ill. The emphasis here is that we must merit a mild Judge, and follow his commandments so that we might be his ‘dyrlingas’⁵⁴⁴ in Heaven. He watches over all: everything we have is from God, and we ought to share these good things with others, or they will be taken away. Those whom the Lord

⁵³⁷ Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, p. 116.

⁵³⁸ Zacher, ‘Sin, Syntax and Synonyms’, p. 60.

⁵³⁹ Szarmach, ‘Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure’, p. 245.

⁵⁴⁰ Heckman, ‘The Sweet Song of Satan’, p. 67.

⁵⁴¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 201, ‘Ruler and Creator and Steersman of all creation’.

⁵⁴² Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, p. 118.

⁵⁴³ Haines, ‘Courtroom Dramas’, pp. 119-21.

⁵⁴⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 202, ‘darlings’.

deprives of the things he had previously given them are now challenged to get by without him. The poor love and honour him, and as they depend on him they will never be abandoned. Again, the homilist exhorts that we must love him with all our being, and that mercy will be granted to the repentant. By turning to the better we will see the true Lord, and travel to the Father's kingdom, where the Lord Christ will reign forever. Yet again, it is the call to immediate repentance that is the purpose of the homily, with Christ in Judgement an object of awe and fear.

XV. Alia omelia de Die Iudicii

Vercelli XV is a unique eschatological homily, the first in a group of four drawn from a single archetype. Both Gatch and Wright note that it is interested in the signs preceding the end, using the Apocalypse of Thomas.⁵⁴⁵ The homilist's Latin source and environment were probably intellectually poor. In Scragg's opinion the homilist translated slavishly, with what little he added being repetitive.⁵⁴⁶ While acknowledging the close translation, Wright does not consider it a 'slavish' copying, as its additions try to pre-empt scepticism, and the homilist both refers to the politics of the Benedictine reform and removes some anachronisms, such as the prophecy alluding to historical emperors.⁵⁴⁷ He notes that one subtle revision the homilist makes involves changing Christ's name from *pater omnium spirituum* to *ealra gasta nerigend*, removing trinitarian complications.⁵⁴⁸ Elsewhere Wright points out variations from the source in the sequence of signs.⁵⁴⁹ There is no surviving intermediate source, though the Apocalypse of Thomas is also used in Blickling VII and two other Old English translations. Following the scene of Judgement the homily turns to another source to describe the intercession of the saints and the locking of Hell. Its narrative structure begins by relating the apocalyptic events that Christ assured Thomas would precede Judgement Day, concluding with those expected in the last week, and Christ's appearance the week before Judgement. Vercelli XV is one of the rare homilies in which Christ actually speaks. According to Wright, the homilist deliberately authenticates Christ's speeches, using introductory phrases and direct speech, but also adding to them.⁵⁵⁰ The Lord tells of the evil that will happen in the last times, and warns that they will be a time of woe for those who are

⁵⁴⁵ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 152 and Wright, 'Vercelli Homily XV and *The Apocalypse of Thomas*', pp. 150-1.

⁵⁴⁶ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 252.

⁵⁴⁷ Wright, 'Vercelli Homily XV and *The Apocalypse of Thomas*', p. 160.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁴⁹ Wright, 'Some New Latin Texts', p. 41.

⁵⁵⁰ Wright, 'Vercelli Homily XV and *The Apocalypse of Thomas*', pp. 167-8.

living. Christ repeats the phrase ‘Ic eom se ælmihtiga dryhten 7 eallra gasta nerigend’,⁵⁵¹ showing again his divinity and power, but also his equally important role in salvation. On the seventh day of the last times He will appear, dreadful, terrible and fierce.

At this point there is an unusual – and no doubt unorthodox – insertion, which is intended to show the power of intercessory prayer. Clayton suggests in the motif of intercession a link between this homily and several others, with the source being the Apocalypse of Mary, in turn dependent on the Apocalypse of Paul. She thinks the motif is unique to England, and well enough known for Ælfric to refute it as heresy. The Vercelli homily is less outlandish than some of the other texts, as the intercession occurs before the final Judgement and does not show Christ changing his mind about his absolute decision.⁵⁵² After a lacuna due to a lost leaf, the homily recommences at Judgement with Mary, Michael and Peter pleading for the sinners. Mary speaks to Christ of his humility, asking him to spare the people, his ‘handgeworces’, from the devil.⁵⁵³ St Peter and St Michael also intercede, and each receives a third of the souls. Interestingly, there is variation in the three intercessions, with Mary addressing *Min Drihten Hælend Crist*, but Michael and Peter addressing the *Drihten Ælmihtig* from their respective roles as defender of souls and bearer of the keys to Heaven and Hell, Peter also referring to the Lord’s ‘cynedome’ and ‘þrymme’.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, while both Mary and Michael speak of ‘handgeworc’, acknowledging his role as Creator, Peter speaks of ‘ðysses earman 7 ðysses synfullan heapes’.⁵⁵⁵ This highlights their relationship to Christ as his saints with different roles. Though the outcome is slightly unclear, each receive a third of the condemned souls, which must be a diminished third each time as many are still sent to Hell. While Christ is the Trustworthy Judge, it is shown to be his highest saints who intercede and save people, rather than his own mercy while on the Judgement seat. Seemingly, Christ cannot choose to be lenient of his own accord, but requires that people pray so that the condemned should be spared. God welcomes the blessed as in Matthew 25.34 and damns the sinners as in Matthew 25.41. They are driven to Hell by devils, and Peter locks the door to Hell after them and throws away the key. Peter cannot look, whether out of distaste, fear or compassion. The Lord goes with his angels, apostles and saints into the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal joy. Christ is indeed a judge, but though he is merciful when called upon, it is his saints who come across as truly compassionate.

⁵⁵¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 256, ‘I am the Almighty Lord and the Saviour of all spirits’.

⁵⁵² Clayton, *Delivering the Damned*, pp. 92-102.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, ‘handiwork’.

⁵⁵⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 260, ‘kingdom’ and ‘glory’.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ‘this wretched and sinful troop’.

Summary

Throughout the eschatological homilies, Christ is a passive figure if he has any direct role at all. While the most important factor in deciding judgement is what the people merit, the final two homilies here show the importance of intercession, and make the Judgement scene a more dramatic, and less pre-determined affair. These homilies present a multi-faceted image of Christ: while he is divine and mighty, he also feels the need to explain his compassion in the incarnation, and is shown in some homilies to be an intimate and friendly Father. The audience is worked upon emotively in some very dramatic scenes, which aim to compel them to earn Heaven, which they will share with Christ. Here, Christ is the target at the end of the tunnel, but his teachings are not so much emphasised as the way of getting there as might be expected. Rather, there are vague ideas of merit, and penance, with the audience presumably already aware of what this should entail.

Exegetical/Liturgical Homilies

Introduction

Few of the homilies in the Vercelli book could be called exegetical, or even strictly homiletic in the sense of an extended discussion on a piece of scripture. Those that are generally celebrate major liturgical feasts: there are two homilies for the Nativity, and one each for Easter, the Epiphany, and the Presentation in the Temple. These homilies are wide-ranging in their style and presumably their purpose, from barely more than recounting the gospel text to applying unusual and striking typology.

I. De Parasceue

The first homily in the Vercelli Book is a close recounting of the passion of Christ, mostly following John 18 and 19, but at times Matthew 26 and 27. Scragg contends that the narrative style of Vercelli I is exclusive to Canterbury: it is a mostly verbatim gospel account, with sparse homiletic commentary and explanations. There are two surviving versions of this homily, of which the Vercelli Book version is closer to the wording of the gospels.⁵⁵⁶ The other version also has a lengthy introduction on the Old Testament prefiguration of the Redemption and on the life of Christ, which is not legible on the first leaf of the Vercelli Book.⁵⁵⁷ As Vercelli I is essentially a retelling of the passion according to John, like the

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

fourth evangelist it focuses on Christ's divine nature. Particular emphasis is put on Christ's awareness that he is the fulfilment of the prophecies, as well as on his innocence, honesty and openness, and the fact that he neither fears nor is subservient to human power. The homilist calls him 'dryhten hælende Crist', and 'heofonlica cyning'.⁵⁵⁸ Whilst Christ acknowledges his divinity and status as Son of God, he does not boast about it, often not even responding to questions. He is envied, as his leadership qualities represent a threat to the status quo, whether that is the rule of Rome, as suggested (by the priests and to Pilate), or the priests themselves. In a double play on the usual message, Caiaphas says it is better for one man to die rather than all, referring to the potential suppression of the Jews by Rome rather than death in Hell. This is remarked upon by the homilist: 'sæde soð, swa he nyste, for ðan ðe Cristes þrowung 7 his lichamlic deað eallum his þam halgum to ecum gode gelamp'.⁵⁵⁹ Christ calls himself king, with all kingdoms in his power, though it is not an earthly kingdom. He pities those who are to die, and at his own death shows compassion, arranging for John's adoption by, and of, Mary. It is only at the end that the homily ventures into apocryphal texts after a mostly orthodox account. The horror of the Crucifixion is reflected in the natural world, as the sun shuts off its light so as not to see what had been done to the Creator. After his death, Christ descends to Hell, binds the devil, and leads souls out. The fact that this text is the first in the Vercelli book indicates its importance to the compiler, but it can be regarded as little more than a biblical translation with very little interpretation, except to give thanks to Christ for his great humility; of course, these gospel passages are crucial and fundamental texts for the Christian faith, and key for the understanding of all the texts to follow. English translations of even such significant scriptural passages would not have been readily available in Anglo-Saxon England, so the homily is worthwhile in that function alone, particularly if it was for personal reading and meditation. In its focus on Christ's divinity, rather than his humanity, which is shown more clearly in some of the other gospel accounts, this text implicitly links itself to the others in the Vercelli Book which so often show, or imply, Christ enthroned in glory on the seat of Judgement. The few exegetical homilies described below do not show the human ministry of Jesus, wearied and dirty from the road, but major moments of revelation of his divine nature, all of which show God claiming him as his Son, or Christ being recognised as such by exceptionally wise people.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28, 'Lord Saviour Christ', 'Heavenly Father'.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19 'he spoke the truth, as he did not know, because Christ's suffering and his bodily death happened for the eternal good of all his saints'.

V and VI.

Vercelli V and VI each recount the events and significance of the nativity, both largely according to Luke's account. They have in common some striking allusions which are not apparent in any of the other Old English nativity sermons, particularly that the Emperor Augustus is portrayed as a type for Christ. Vercelli V, a Christmas homily, translates and interprets Luke 2:1-14, with conflated commentary from Gregory's *Homilia VIII in euangelia* and other sources such as Orosius and the *Catechesis Celtica*,⁵⁶⁰ Jerome's version of Eusebius' *Chronicon*, Livy's *Liber Prodigiorum*, and the Old English Martyrology.⁵⁶¹ Scragg is unsure 'whether the piece is a translation of a lost Latin homily or was put together in English from material traditionally used in Latin Nativity Homilies'.⁵⁶² It survives in three manuscripts, in two of which it is the first text. All three manuscripts derive from a faulty archetype.⁵⁶³ Gatch highlights some of the eschatological ambiguity of the collection, which is evident here: in homily I, Christ is shown to have broken the power of death, and delivered the elect, so that it is unnecessary for anyone who does right to go to Hell. Yet, in homily V, except for Christ, all those who have risen are to taste death again, and rise on the Last Day.⁵⁶⁴ These inconsistencies reveal both the diverse nature of the sources from which the compiler drew, and presumably the lack of concern about this felt by the compiler.

V. *To Middanwintra*. Ostende nobis Domine.

Vercelli V starts on the divine level, saying that the Lord, the King of Glory, humbled himself for our salvation, and descended from Heaven to earth in order to become human. His humanity is described as the reason for which the merciful Father would not let creation perish, as it was his (Christ's) image; more conventionally the incarnation of Christ would be seen as the means by which God saved creation, rather than the obstacle which prevented its annihilation. Nonetheless, the homilist says that Christ, by taking on humanity, would redeem humanity as a whole from captivity. The passage of scripture is then translated and interpreted, focusing on some verses more than others. The shepherds are told of the Saviour, Christ the Lord, who was born in the city of David. A number of portents for Christ's birth are described. Hall points out that the homilist does not appear to be concerned by the fact that while some of the portents happen before Christ's birth, others follow it.⁵⁶⁵ He supports

⁵⁶⁰ Cross, 'Portents and Events', p. 209.

⁵⁶¹ Hall, 'Portents at Christ's Birth', p. 68.

⁵⁶² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 108.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 147.

⁵⁶⁵ Hall, 'Portents at Christ's Birth', p. 65.

an Irish origin for the portents tradition, which, however, he believes was declining by the time of this author.⁵⁶⁶ Firstly, Augustus is considered as a token for the human Christ, the allusion mostly derived from Orosius's *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*.⁵⁶⁷ Hall describes Augustus as 'implicitly promoted as a type of Christ',⁵⁶⁸ and the commonalities between the emperor and the infant Christ are certainly extensive when described in a particular way: Augustus is described as in power, having his word carried over the earth, ruling all the earth; he forgave people their sins, he compelled his servants to serve him well, he brought peace, and should be given appropriate tribute. As Augustus was a pagan Roman, this comparison is striking, though the analogy holds, and indeed both Augustus and Christ are known as Prince of Peace, albeit Augustus achieved peace after warfare and then took the title *princeps*. Christ is further betokened by wonders: the sun, which he created, typifies his fairness, whilst the Earth betokens his body. As Christ is *lifigenda hlaf*, the Living Bread, the name Bethlehem is alleged to mean *Hlafes hus*, the house of bread.⁵⁶⁹ The manger betokens the altar, with Christ's body as food for holy animals, i.e. the members of the church. This analogy does not quite work, as while Christ lies in the manger, the place of food for animals, and through the eucharist becomes the spiritual food of the church, the Infant Jesus is of course not eaten by the ox and ass, who would however eat the normal contents of a manger. Yet, the eucharist could be adored as well as consumed, and it is certainly a commonplace in Nativity images that the animals also adore the infant.⁵⁷⁰ The homilist explains some theological quibbles: Christ is called *frumbearn*⁵⁷¹ because he is the first of all creation and created everything, not because Mary had other sons. His role in redemption is also explained:

For ure lufan he astah of heofonum on eorðan, þæt we astigan fram eorðan to heofonum. He wæs þearfendlice mid claðum bewunden þæt he us of synna bendum alysde. He wæs on binne aseted on nearwe stowe 7 on medmicle þæt he us forgife wondoreardunge on heofona rice.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

⁵⁶⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 108.

⁵⁶⁸ Hall, 'Portents at Christ's Birth', p. 65.

⁵⁶⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 117.

⁵⁷⁰ Isaiah 1.3 says 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood', and the idea of Christ being adored by animals comes up in *Euangelium pseudo-Matthaei*.

⁵⁷¹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 118, 'firstborn'.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 120, 'For love of us he came down from the Heavens to earth, so that we should ascend from earth to the Heavens. He was wound with clothes in a destitute manner so that he loosed us from the bonds of sin. He was place in a manger in a narrow and humble place so that he might give us a marvellous habitation in the kingdom of Heaven'.

No-one rose from death before him as he was to bury death; this is, of course, referring to rising to Heaven and burying eternal death. This does not try to explain the gospel accounts of Christ raising people from the dead, which are elsewhere explained away as the people who would die again, and without Christ's sacrifice to eternal death. Christ is immeasurably great: 'his miht is ufor þonne heofon 7 bradre þonne eorðe 7 deopre þonne sæ 7 leohtre þonne heofones tungel. Ne genealæceð him nænig ylðo ne sorh ne sar ne deað, ne his rices bið æfre ænig ende',⁵⁷³ which he gives to us all if we wish to earn it. The conclusion refers back to God's mercy, with an exhortation to praise God, and a portrayal of the seven delights of Heaven.⁵⁷⁴ All in all, this homily is probably the most complex discussion of Christ's nature in the Vercelli Book. The exegesis of the nativity text is only the start point for grand cosmological considerations, with the birth of the baby being reflected in both the natural and social environments, and its purpose seen within the major greater framework of the divine plan.

VI. Incipit narrare miracula que facta fuerant ante adventum Saluatoris Domini nostri Iesu Christi.

The following homily, Vercelli VI, is another unique homily for Christmas Day, only occurring in this manuscript,⁵⁷⁵ and considerably shorter than the one previous. The two homilies are interrupted by two poems, *Andreas* and *Fates of the Apostles*, suggesting that they probably did not come from the same original manuscript. Moreover, whilst Cross acknowledges Orosius as a source here, it is through a line of transmission which relies on *Pseudo Matthaei Evangelium*, different from Vercelli V. Cross suggests this text may have been composed as a prelude to this apocryphal gospel.⁵⁷⁶ Biggs concludes due its usage here that the two parts of *Pseudo Matthaei Evangelium* must have been joined by the tenth century, rather than the eleventh as previously thought.⁵⁷⁷ The homily contains apocryphal material regarding the Nativity and early life of Christ. It begins by praising the Incarnation, and recounting its portents, including Augustus's recognition of these. Again, most of these portents derive from Orosius, transmitted through lost intermediate sources. The remainder of the homily relies on *Euangelium pseudo-Matthaei*. It closely translates selections from the

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 121, 'His power is higher than Heaven and broader than the earth and deeper than the sea and lighter than Heaven's star. Neither age nor sorrow nor pain nor death approach him, nor will there ever be any end for his kingdom'.

⁵⁷⁴ Hill, 'Seven Joys of Heaven', pp. 165-6. Hill notes the seven joys of Heaven are enumerated in parallel texts in several manuscripts, which act as a direct source for Christ III.

⁵⁷⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 126.

⁵⁷⁶ Cross, 'Portents and Events', pp. 214-5.

⁵⁷⁷ Biggs, 'Vercelli Homily 6', p. 176.

narrative of the flight into Egypt, ending with a summary and exhortation. While it is well organised it has little indication of context,⁵⁷⁸ and as a whole, the homily uses little conventional preaching language.⁵⁷⁹ This homily shares many of the features of the previous one. Christ is described in superlative terms, as ‘ealra cyninga cyning 7 ealra wealdendra waldend’.⁵⁸⁰ The Almighty Lord came into the world through a pure maiden, because of his love of us, and in order to redeem mankind from Hell and to bring us towards Heaven. He filled the earth with light.⁵⁸¹ A number of amazing portents, listed by the homilist, occurred before he was born. Augustus recognises the significance of one of these, that it is ‘hiofona cyninges tacen’,⁵⁸² and knows that he is seeking the world. While this would indicate that Augustus was a prophet, further typology is drawn here, with it being noted that Christ, like Augustus, released prisoners and forgave sins.⁵⁸³ The text goes on to an apocryphal path, following the flight into Egypt, and in doing so suggesting the very different recognition of Christ by Herod, who viewed him as a threat and sought to destroy him, the reason for which they fled. When the Christ-child enters a cave with Mary, a dragon leaves, displaying Christ’s power, just as later idols would fall down before him in temples.⁵⁸⁴ Returning to Luke’s narrative, the homily concludes that the Saviour grew, strengthened in spirit, and ‘mægene 7 snyterro he wæs gefylled mid Gode 7 mid mannum’.⁵⁸⁵ This homily is more focused on the nativity itself than is the preceding homily, but because of this it misses some of the greater significance which the feast and all of the portents celebrate. Christ’s significance and power are shown, but the focus is more on his qualities and actions as a man, rather than his role in Heaven.

XVI. Omelia Epyffania Domini

Vercelli XVI is a unique homily, rubricated for Epiphany, with lengthy exegesis on Christ’s baptism, as at Matthew 3.13-17,⁵⁸⁶ but none at all regarding the visitation of the wise men, at Matthew 2.1-6. Hall explains that whilst in the medieval West Epiphany usually commemorates the visitation of the wise men, the wedding at Cana and the baptism of Christ, the Vercelli homily is unusual in only covering the last. It is ‘the only medieval vernacular

⁵⁷⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 126.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128, ‘King of all kings and Ruler of all rulers’.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 129, ‘sign of the King of the Heavens’.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131, ‘he was filled with God and with humankind in might and wisdom’.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

Epiphany homily to do [this],’ but this arrangement also occurs in Bede’s Epiphany homily.⁵⁸⁷ Whilst no single immediate source for this homily has been identified, Scragg considers most of the exegesis to be commonplace, followed by a conventional exhortation to follow Christian virtues. The text has suffered in transmission, so readings are difficult to reconstruct.⁵⁸⁸ This account of Christ’s baptism again presents an image of the divine, rather than human Christ: he wishes to be baptised not to have his sins washed away, but to set an example for the salvation of mankind. Szarmach describes Christ’s baptism as ‘heroic and miraculous’,⁵⁸⁹ and like *Rood* the homily does emphasise Christ’s perfection, and generosity towards his people. Christ journeyed from Galilee to the Jordan in order to be baptised by John, who thought that it should be Christ baptising him. While the baptismal water cleansed the people, Christ cleansed and blessed all water, and was baptised so that afterwards all mankind would be children of God, establishing an example for the salvation and humility of all. Moving beyond the gospel, and contradicting the preamble, Christ tells John that ‘Ic eom deadlic mann 7 gehrorenlic, 7 þurh Adames scylde ic eom gebunden, 7 ic for ðan hæbbe þæs fulwihtes bæð 7 þære clænsunge þearfe’.⁵⁹⁰ This is extremely unusual, with no known source, and must be a good example of the error that so concerned Ælfric. Within the text, however, John refutes this idea, saying that Christ’s baptism is not necessary as he is pure, and moreover everyone will become pure through him. Whilst John feared Christ’s humility, with the ‘heofonlica cyning’ under his hands, he was obedient, echoing the *Rood* following Christ’s wishes even when it seemed contrary to his status.⁵⁹¹ The homilist tells us that Christ came to earth as he wished to fulfil this himself, suggesting that he might have sent somebody else on his behalf but chose not to, rather than that his advent was the only possible way of redemption. In accordance with the saying of Psalm 113.5, the Jordan stood still while the Saviour was in it, indicating that all creation perceives the power of the Creator;⁵⁹² however, the homilist point out that Christ was not recognised by the ‘forheardydan heortan Iudeas’.⁵⁹³ The Heavens open to Christ, and all created things are openly subjected to him,⁵⁹⁴ which, as Spinks points out, signifies the new openness of

⁵⁸⁷ Hall, ‘The Reversal of the Jordan’, pp. 53 and 71.

⁵⁸⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 266.

⁵⁸⁹ Szarmach, ‘Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure’, p. 254.

⁵⁹⁰ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 268, ‘I am a mortal and perishable man, and I am bound by Adam’s sin, and therefore I have need of the bath of baptism and this cleansing’.

⁵⁹¹ cf. *Rood* ll. 42-7.

⁵⁹² Raw, in *Trinity*, p. 111, notes that the image of the Jordan standing still was not in the Gregorian source, but added by the Vercelli homilist.

⁵⁹³ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 270, ‘hard-hearted Jews’.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 266 notes that the universe’s recognition of the power of God comes from Gregory.

Heaven for all, made available by Christ crossing over into humanity.⁵⁹⁵ The Holy Spirit is never apart from Christ, as they came to earth as one divine nature, yet the dove does come down on Christ. Szarmach argues that the descending dove is allegorised in a speech by John the Baptist, paraphrasing the doctrinal statement of the divine nature of the Son.⁵⁹⁶ Upon the descent of the dove John does indeed reveal his own understanding of the Lord and his forgiveness and compassion. In a brief description of Christ in his humanity, the homilist says he did not want to judge harshly but to act compassionately, and to forgive the penitent. Speaking from the Heavens, the Father calls him ‘min se leofa sunu’,⁵⁹⁷ in whom he is well pleased. In contrast to an accompanying description of all holy people being God’s children, due to upright behaviour, the Saviour Christ is ‘þone ælmihtigan Godfæder gecyndelic sunu’,⁵⁹⁸ presumably indicating that they are of one divine nature, because Christ was ‘of Godfæder acenned ær eallum gesceaftum, soð God of soðum Gode 7 se ælmihtiga of ðam ælmihtigan, 7 ealle gesceafta þurh him gesceapene 7 geworhte wæron’.⁵⁹⁹ thus Christ is of God’s nature. The unity of God continues to be emphasised, with the Trinity compared to a flame, and described as ‘an God 7 an godcund sped 7 an miht 7 an þrym 7 an wuldor 7 an willa 7 efenece’.⁶⁰⁰ Scragg dismisses this Trinitarian motif as conventional,⁶⁰¹ and Raw points out it is later used by Ælfric.⁶⁰² The eternal, true God existed before all creation, and all was created through Him, who rules forever. This general doxology is at last brought back down to the individual level, with a final admonition that we need to attain Heaven through the Lord Saviour Christ, which remains the essence of this homily and all its complex ideas. This is one of the most overtly theological of the Vercelli Homilies, focusing on God even more than on the audience. Throughout this homily, Christ’s divine unity with God is heavily emphasised, though the unusual suggestion of him needing to cleanse his sin shows that for the homilist he also had human traits, which could again be developed for the edification of his audience.

⁵⁹⁵ Spinks, *Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, p. 131.

⁵⁹⁶ Szarmach, ‘The Vercelli Prose and Anglo-Saxon Literary History’, p. 25.

⁵⁹⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 271, ‘my beloved Son’.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272, ‘the natural Son of God the almighty Father’.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, ‘begotten of the Father before all creation, true God from true God and the Almighty from the Almighty, and all creation was shaped and made through him.’

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 273, ‘one God and one divine Success and one Might and one Power and one Glory and one Will and eternal’.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁶⁰² Raw, *Trinity*, p. 35. In its conventionality, however, this is not to attribute this text as an influence on Ælfric.

XVII. De Purificatione Sancta[e] Maria[e]

Vercelli XVII is a unique homily for the Purification, based on Luke 2.22-32, as is freely translated in the opening paragraph. Scragg believes it is impossible to say how much departures from Scripture are due to error in transmission or deliberate alterations by the homilist. There is no immediate source for the remainder of the homily, but the ideas drawn on include those of Bede and Ambrosius Autpertus.⁶⁰³ Clayton uses this homily as an example of an orthodox text.⁶⁰⁴ The author seems to have had problems with Latin, and together with the basic interpretation this suggests that it seems to have been composed in an ‘intellectually impoverished climate’.⁶⁰⁵ Despite this, Scragg decrees the homily ‘a relatively well-ordered piece with a straightforward message rendered forceful by repetition’ of words and word elements.⁶⁰⁶ The feast of the Purification recalls the presentation of Christ at the temple, forty days after his birth. This is a Marian feast, though with major Christological significance. At this point, Jewish women were to present themselves for ritualistic purification after giving birth. According to the homilist, Mary was still pure, but chose to follow the customs and to set an example, as of course did Christ in his desert fasting, and at his baptism, as in the above homily. The homilist uses this adherence to old ways to argue that Christ was strengthening, not breaking down, the Old Law. At forty days after the birth, corresponding with the purification of the mother, a first-born son was to be taken to Jerusalem to be given to God, and the parents were to give a sacrifice. Christ is described himself as an offering brought by his parents, linking to God’s own giving of his only Son, and which here is described as signifying Christ’s suffering for love of us in order to enable us to be blessed in his kingdom. A brief creed of Christ’s suffering and death is also provided, though the resurrection is only alluded to in his promise of eternal life. Christ’s parents also sacrifice a pair of doves, as is discussed in more detail in Ælfric’s homily for the Purification (I.9): here they represent life’s purity and innocence. The interpretation of the sacrificial birds is dependent on Bede’s commentary on Luke: ‘Christ’s parents brought a poor man’s offering to symbolize Christ’s gift to the poor,’ ... ‘and the birds represent chastity and innocence, qualities which Simeon possessed, and which we are exhorted to possess.’⁶⁰⁷ These qualities enable Simeon to recognise Christ, which implies that should we possess them, we would be able to do likewise. Simeon is described as an old man who knew

⁶⁰³ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, pp. 278-9.

⁶⁰⁴ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 265.

⁶⁰⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 280.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

he would not to die until he had seen the Saviour, and when he sees Christ at the Temple, he recognises and adores him, as a salvation for all peoples. Christ's divinity is acknowledged, with Christ himself merely a passive figure. He is the True Light who enlightens all. Jerusalem, the 'sybbe gesyhðe',⁶⁰⁸ is described as a type for Christ, the vision of True Peace, and the church a later representative of this.⁶⁰⁹ In her analysis of the rhetoric of this homily, Zacher describes the passage about Jerusalem as *visio pacis* as a 'sophisticated and intricate typology', pointing out the deliberate internal resonance present in the Old English homily, which does not exist in the Latin: the interpretation of the temple as a figure for Christ is new. Through the repetition of rhetorical elements the people become a part of the vision of peace, which is Christ.⁶¹⁰ Thus, Christ permeates this homily as the central object, the location and the desired outcome. The purpose of the homily is to advocate purity from sin, exemplified especially by Christ and Mary. The homilist reminds the audience that humankind was told in advance of the Lord, the consolation, salvation, and eternal redemption for people who believe in him. He says that the Saviour is true eternal light, who enlightens each man, with strength and glory. Through necessity (though the homily does not specify whether it is his need or ours), Christ descended to earth through love, and freed us from eternal death. He grants eternal life and rest if we earn it. Through his birth and human body, the Saviour Christ opened the door of the kingdom of Heaven, and through his suffering and death, he freed humankind from the devil's authority.⁶¹¹ The homily ends with an exhortation on the theme of peace and love, with a reminder of Christ's role as Redeemer and the need to thank him. The emphasis is again on the birth of Christ as the first step in God's plan of salvation for humanity, and the fulfilment of prophecy, with the infant Christ a passive object in the plot.

Summary

This group of homilies focuses on events in Christ's life which are of major doctrinal significance, celebrated in the church's calendar. Though these homilies are based around narratives of Christ's life, for most of them his divine status and plan is the predominant concern, and the object for discussion and reflection. These homilies go beyond the conventional parameters of the gospels, with unusual comparisons, and words from the mouth of Christ which are not attributed to him elsewhere. These elevate his status, showing

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283, 'Vision of Peace'.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-9.

⁶¹⁰ Zacher, 'Rereading', pp. 192 and 195.

⁶¹¹ Briefly, the homilist refers to angels praising Christ at his birth, recognising that he was clothed with a human body, as in Blickling I.

his significance to not only stretch to the Heavens, but from Adam to Augustus, and throughout the world. Christ is nearly always a passive figure performing a prescribed role, not only in the infancy narratives, but also in the Passion. It is only in the homily for the Epiphany that he asserts his desires and intentions. The holy and great people who react to him, Mary, John the Baptist, Simeon and Augustus, are the models we ought to identify with in the recognition of Christ for who he is, beyond what can be ascertained from his physical, very human presence.

Rogationtide Homilies

Introduction

Six of the homilies of the Vercelli Book are intended for Rogationtide, some of which are rubricated, others simply sharing the common themes of repentance and organised in groups within the book. The focus of these homilies is not on Christ, but on how we ought to respond to him for the salvation of the soul, in prayer (rogation) and penitential acts, such as fasting, in order to deserve Heaven: this is explained at the beginning of the first Rogation homily, XI. The only image of Christ presented is in Judgement, with God the Creator also mentioned. Some of the homilies allude to the Old Testament, but the gospels are only mentioned once, speaking of Christ fasting (XII). Wright argues for an audience of secular clerics, due to the need shown to reconcile spiritual life with personal property, though it would also be suitable for the laity.⁶¹² These homilies may have been used by the clerics as a model for preaching.⁶¹³

XI. Spel to forman Gangdæge

Vercelli XI is the initial homily of the first group of three unique rogation homilies. It is primarily a translation, with some modification and varying degrees of proximity, of two sermons by Caesarius of Arles. However, the concept of perseverance as necessary for salvation is not in Caesarius's text.⁶¹⁴ There is a degree of originality, with the first two homilies of this grouping the only ones known to connect Peter to Rogationtide, which is discussed further in relation to the next homily.⁶¹⁵ XI states that Rogationtide was established by Peter, because of the error of heathens. It is the only homily to suggest that the Last Times

⁶¹² Wright, 'Vercelli Homilies XI-XIII and the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform', pp. 207 and 211. He even hints at evidence of a protest against the Benedictine Reform and the stripping of land at the end of homily XI.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶¹⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 219.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

are coming.⁶¹⁶ The Old English homilist focuses on the evils of the present days, mentioning the robbery of churches. While this has been used as evidence to date the homily to the late tenth century, the references are general, with literary precedents.⁶¹⁷ The rituals of Rogationtide included penitential pilgrimages, and Vercelli XI suggests that this includes the use of candles to light the way. The homilist ties this to scripture and the church, saying that the Lord gave us spiritual candles in his prophets and priests, who are clearly meant to illuminate our path to God. True joy cannot be found in the world, but in Christ himself, in Heaven's kingdom, where the Lord Saviour waits for us in Jerusalem with outstretched arms, and there strife and struggle will end, for which the Lord is to be thanked. According to Paul, while we are in the body we are exiled from God. Reunion with Christ is something to be desired, and earned. The time of the body is a time of hardship, but in Heaven no bad things will be able to happen. Exile and endurance, in order to be reunited with a distant Lord, are at the core of this homily, in a typically elegiac style of longing, though with definite hope.

XII. Spel to oðrum Gangdæge

Vercelli XII, the second Rogation homily, has no known parallel or source. It begins by expanding on the information of the previous homily, regarding St Peter establishing Rogationtide to replace a heathen custom of three days of sacrifice to the gods of the annual increase, and explains the practices of the season, with the significance of the reliquaries and the need to honour the Trinity and saints. In the second half of the homily, the presence of God when people gather in his name, such as in their Rogationtide procession, leads the preacher to warn people to fear him. The homilist highlights the constant need to regard the spiritual life.⁶¹⁸ XII emphasises the need to bear holy things on Rogationtide pilgrimages, including the sign of Christ's Cross, 'on þam he sylfa þrowode for mancynnes alysnesse'.⁶¹⁹ The gospel books, telling of Christ's life, preaching, miracles, and spiritual mysteries, must also be carried. Christ's fast, contained in the gospels, is emphasised, and the homilist reminds that God is present when others are gathered in his name, so both alluding to the pilgrims' replication of Christ's actions, and the fact that he is there with them as they walk and pray. We must thank him for his salvation, and glorify the Trinity. We should fear the Heavenly Lord, the origin of wisdom, who brings forth ardour and humility from us. To reign with Christ we need to exchange worldly desires for immortality, seek the Lord's relics and

⁶¹⁶ Gatch, 'Eschatology', p. 152.

⁶¹⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, pp. 219-20.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228 'on which he himself suffered for the redemption of humankind'.

teach others to earn God's mercy, kindness and honour. Again, the focus is on joining Christ in immortality in Heaven, with all acts for this purpose alone. Christ is an important member of this procession. He is represented by the gospel books, which are not carried in order to be read (though this may be done also), but because they are holy for their own sake, containing the stories of Christ's life, and thus acting as a relic of his deeds, and teaching, on earth. The Cross is also a reminder of Christ and his saving act. Christ's presence is emphasised through these reminders, along with the allusion to 'For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'.⁶²⁰ God brings forth fear, humility and ardour, and is the origin of wisdom. It is unusual for this collection that the congregation is associated with Christ in his fast, but it makes joining him in Heaven seem more achievable in the present, rather than the distant – and hypothetical – future. To reign with him, we must exchange our worldly desires for immortality, seek his relics, and teach others about the faith, all challenging tasks, but not unachievable.

XIII. Spel to þriddan Gangdæge

Vercelli XIII is the last in this block of homilies. It is both unique and fragmentary, with one leaf missing. Di Sciacca discusses the possibility of an *ubi sunt* passage in the lacuna before the speech of the dry bones.⁶²¹ It is designated for the final day of Rogation, the eve of the Ascension. It discusses the necessity of shrift before the following day's mass. The homilist stresses the need to be cleansed of sins committed during the Easter season. As best can be ascertained due to the lacuna, the final section seems to be concerned with repentance and atonement, and in the 'dry bones' speech taken from Caesarius, gives a graphic warning of the fate of man with an illustration of the transience of revelry and vices. Cross points out that the source author, Caesarius of Arles, was writing within a tradition that emphasized that the delights of this life end in the sepulchre. He made a forceful enough variation on this theme in *De Eleemosinis* that it was adapted closely by a Latin homilist and two Old English homilists, and used as a framework by another Old English preacher.⁶²² Scragg considers that the Latin probably circulated independently of its original context.⁶²³ As Cross says, it was the skeleton's speech that must have been of value to the admonitory sermons, as the material following it was not copied. Vercelli XIII is not a literal translation, but does sometimes follow the source very closely. It departs from the Latin text to sum up and point out the

⁶²⁰ Matthew 18.20.

⁶²¹ Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, p. 127.

⁶²² Cross, 'Dry Bones', pp. 434-6.

⁶²³ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 233.

moral.⁶²⁴ This concluding observation is that death comes without warning, and the homilist mentions Judgement, advising the congregation to follow a good life. This is a very short homily, due partly to its lacuna, but it focuses on the need to serve the Lord, and be pure, through atonement, in order to receive the covenant, his body and blood. The Lord will ordain our eternal life as we earn in the world, so we should listen to his teaching in order to be better, and to follow his wishes, so that we might join him in eternity with the Trinity.

XIX, XX and XXI.

Vercelli XIX, XX and XXI comprise another set of Rogation pieces, the first two on the Trinity and the Creation, and the last on the terror of the Last Judgement. Linguistically they are very similar, with few scribal errors, probably composed in the late tenth century in Canterbury.⁶²⁵ They are attributed to a single author.⁶²⁶ They all draw primarily on the homiliary of St Père de Chartres, but are supplemented from other sources.⁶²⁷ Fox also links them to the Ascension Day homily in the homiliary CCCC 162, and argues that they show ‘the first attempt to follow the traditional guidelines of Augustine in a series of vernacular sermons, and thus to anticipate what Ælfric and Wulfstan would later do in single occasion sermons’.⁶²⁸

XIX.

Homily XIX discusses the Trinity, Creation, the Fall of angels, and the Creation and Fall of humanity. Within this setting, Adam’s time on earth and in Hell is calculated. There is an exhortation to follow Christian teaching, and the theme of Rogationtide is introduced, with the importance of three days of prayer exemplified, and a final exhortation and vision of eternal life. The homilist sometimes stays close to the source text, but mixes parts together in original ways.⁶²⁹ XIX survives in four copies, all textually close.⁶³⁰ Latin sources for this homily can be found in Cambridge Pembroke College MS 25, items 36, 38, and 40, though they must have been taken from an earlier version.⁶³¹ The homily has some sentences in common with other texts, such as *The Prose Solomon and Saturn*.⁶³² The focus in this homily

⁶²⁴ Cross, ‘Dry Bones’, pp. 434-6.

⁶²⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 310.

⁶²⁶ Fox, ‘Catechetical Homilies’, p. 254.

⁶²⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, pp. 310-1.

⁶²⁸ Fox, ‘Catechetical Tradition’, p. 257.

⁶²⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 311.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁶³¹ Cross, ‘Cambridge Pembroke College MS 25’, p. 96.

⁶³² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 313.

is on God Almighty, the maker of Heaven and earth, and of all creation, as shown in this relatively extensive discussion on the Trinity:

þrynlicne on hadum 7 anlicne on spede: oðer is soðlice se had ælmihtiges fæder, oðer is ælmihtiges suna, oðer ys ælmihtiges haliges gastes, 7 þeahhwæðere we sceolon andettan anne God on mægenþrymme 7 on mihte 7 on godcundnesse, for þam se fæder ys ece God, 7 se sunu is ece God, 7 se haliga gast ys ece God. Ealle þry, se fæder 7 se sunu 7 se haliga gast, wæron æfre efenece 7 æfre beoð, 7 hie þry an God syndon. Fram þam, þurh þæne 7 on þam syndon geworhte ealle þa þinc þe gesewene syndon 7 ealle þa þe ungesewene syndon, þa ne mæg nan eorþlic man ealle asecgan.⁶³³

In speaking of Creation, the homilist says that ‘ealle he hie of him sylfum mid his oroðe utableow’.⁶³⁴ Hill links the ‘exsufflation’, or ‘blowing out’ of Satan to Christ slaying the Antichrist with the breath of his lips (2 Thes. 2.8 and Is. 11.4), later associated with exorcism by Augustine and Tertullian, to become part of the liturgy of infant baptism. He connects this tradition to the concept of Christ’s breath breaking the gates of Hell, used later by both Langland and Spenser.⁶³⁵ Eternal punishment is ordained for those who reject the Creator, Almighty God. Anachronistically, though of course he is coeternal with the Father, Christ Himself warns Adam and Eve about the tree. Adam positively imitates the Creator, as he has been permitted, by creating names for everything. Lucifer illicitly tries to be equal to the Creator, and in trying to build himself a throne in the north of the kingdom, falls, and he and his followers received eternal punishments for rejecting the Creator. The drive of the homily, is, as usual, the need to pray for mercy, to strive and to turn from sin, and to keep the fast, as God provides eternal joy if we work his will. Examples of those who do not work God’s will are given as a dire warning.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 315, ‘threefold in aspect and single in power: one aspect is truly the Father almighty, another is the Son almighty, another is the almighty Holy Spirit, and yet we should confess one God in power and might and divinity, because the Father is eternal God, the Son is eternal God, and the Holy Ghost is eternal God. All three, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, were always co-eternal and always will be, and those three are one God. From him, through him and in him are worked all the things which are visible and all those which are invisible, for which no earthly man may fully account’.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316, ‘He blew them all out of himself with his own breath’.

⁶³⁵ Hill, ‘When God Blew Satan out of Heaven’, pp. 133 and 136.

XX.

Vercelli XX survives in three manuscripts, and as the Vercelli text is incomplete it needs to be supplemented by the other versions.⁶³⁶ The two principal sources, translated faithfully, are from the St Père homiliary, with other sections influenced by these ideas. It makes an observation on church attendance, in the style of Caesarius, but composing freely.⁶³⁷ The homily represents the earliest extant vernacular version of Alcuin's *Liber de Virtutibus et Vitiis*.⁶³⁸ The need to obey God is illustrated, and a list of sins to avoid is given, with a recommendation to pay tithes and give alms.⁶³⁹ The importance of tithing in the Rogation days is the major theme of Vercelli XX. It warns that we need to leave off our usual behaviour, and beware lest God should take away the fruits of the earth: if we do not give one part in ten, God will take nine parts. Prayer, fasting and alms are necessary, so that God, with the fighting warriors of Christ, will conquer our sins. The sins are enumerated in the Irish style,⁶⁴⁰ along with their corresponding virtues. Fasting and almsgiving join us to the angels, and separate us from the devils. We need to love God, who created us and loosed us from devilish slavery, and hold his commandments. We need to work God's will in the time allotted to us in this world, so that we can go to Heaven where there will be life without death, joy without sadness, beauty without change, in the company of the Eternal Father, the Eternal Son, and the Eternal Holy Ghost. This homily, lacking a central narrative, is also without the preparatory motifs characteristic of some of the Vercelli homilies Szarmach observes.⁶⁴¹ Though the people of the church are described as Christ's warriors, God, rather than Christ, is specified as conquering sins.

XXI.

Vercelli XXI is another Rogationtide homily. While it is a unique text, very little is original, with most sentences from other surviving material, both Latin and English. Nearly half of the homily is translated from the St Père homiliary, with the second half mostly from vernacular sources. The compiler ranges throughout the St Père homiliary, complementing homily XIX, which also makes extensive use of the collection.⁶⁴² The Latin precedent for the text can be

⁶³⁶ Szarmach, 'Vercelli Homily XX', p. 1.

⁶³⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 329.

⁶³⁸ Szarmach, 'Vercelli Homily XX', p. 1. Szarmach notes further in 'The Latin Tradition of Alcuin's *Liber de Virtutibus et Vitiis*', p. 13 and p. 20 that it is derived from one portion of an earlier version of the Latin text extant in Pembroke 25.

⁶³⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 330.

⁶⁴⁰ See further Wright, *Irish Tradition*, ch. 2 'The "Enumerative Style" in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England'.

⁶⁴¹ Szarmach, 'Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure', p. 249.

⁶⁴² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 347.

found in Pembroke 25.⁶⁴³ Wright argues that parts of this homily, namely the fall of the rebel angels, are ‘self-consciously poetical’.⁶⁴⁴ It begins with an exhortation to love God, stressing the need for humility and the avoidance of evil. It briefly links repentance with fasting, then discusses charity, righteousness and the strengths of the soul. The audience is reminded of Christ’s sacrifice and urged to make suitable gifts in return, with doomsday and eternal reward available. A later section paraphrases the beginning of the anonymous poem *An Exhortation to Christian Living*, stressing the need to prepare for Judgement, which is then illustrated using material from homily II, with which it shares a lot of material.⁶⁴⁵ The cutting and pasting mostly works well, with a logical order focused on doomsday. Vercelli XXI gives a theological summary, even a creed, of the roles of God in his relationship to humankind: the Lord Almighty created all things, is our life, our prosperity, our hope, joy, strength, comfort, redemption, protection, illumination, and in the future world will be our glory, bliss, peace, heritage, eternity, light, brightness, beauty, eternal rest. We should follow the true ways of God, which adorn him:

riht geleafa 7 gewiss hiht 7 fulfremed soð lufu 7 þurhwunung on godum dædum 7
godnes 7 anrædnes 7 geþyld 7 liðnes 7 sybb 7 hyrsumnes 7 langsumnes 7 halig
ymbhidignes 7 modes bigeng on haligum smeaugum 7 clænnnes 7 mildheortnes 7
rihtwisnes 7 dryhtnes ege 7 lufu godcundra þinga 7 forhogung hwilwendys wuldres 7
gelustfullung þæs heofonlican eðles.⁶⁴⁶

In describing the incarnation, passion and resurrection, the homilist makes God relevant to the audience, rather than something entirely apart. The Almighty Lord made himself man for our need, died, freed us from devils and Hell with his blood, descended to Hell and released us from eternal death, afflicted the devils, and promises the Heavenly Kingdom. We are redeemed with precious blood. We need to obey him and offer him sacrifice. We come from Adam, and are created from God’s might. The Resolute King, the Almighty Lord, cast the fiend and his followers down. This is used as an example of his just, punishing nature, and the homilist warns that we are rash to presume that he will not come at Doomsday. Overtures to the Book of Revelation are made, with an account of a Cross flowing with blood in clouds,

⁶⁴³ Szarmach, ‘Two Notes’, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁴ Wright, ‘More Old English Poetry’, p. 253.

⁶⁴⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 348.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 353, trans. Cook in *Vercelli Book Homilies*, p. 140, ‘right belief, certain hope, perfected love, perseverance in good deeds, goodness, resoluteness, patience, kindness, friendship, obedience, patience, holy solicitude, the exercise of the mind in holy thoughts, purity, mercy, righteousness, the fear of Lord, the love of sacred things, contempt of transitory glory, and a desire for the heavenly home.’

and ‘dryhtnes onsyn swiðe egeslicu 7 ondrysenlicu’.⁶⁴⁷ The Lord is majestic and glorious, and shows his countenance so that the Jews, his condemners, might see him, the true Judge, come to judge. The Heavenly Kingdom itself is described in terms which are interchangeable with God: ‘leoht ealles leohtes’, ‘se ece gefea’, ‘seo ece torhtnes eallra engla’, ‘seo swete lufu eallra haligra’,⁶⁴⁸ and many more similarly exceptional allusions. The homilist makes a final, simpler exhortation, to give praise to the eternal Lord, the fulfilment and perfection of holy ones.

Summary

The focus throughout the Rogationtide homilies is very strongly on doing enough good in the world, and atoning for ill, so that Christ may receive us in Heaven. The rituals of Rogationtide are designed to make this possible. Whereas the Last Judgement is never alluded to, it is in many ways implied that we are aware of the consequences of our decisions, which will be the result of Christ’s decision in Judgement. Heaven, though not referred to in specific terms, is very desirable, to be shared with the Trinity, but Hell is described in less detail than Heaven. Rogationtide is a time for betterment, and while the means to this is to be *like* Christ, it is the purpose of this, to be *with* Christ, that is paramount.

Unspecified Homilies

Introduction

Several of the homilies of the Vercelli Book are not designated for any particular occasion, and keep their focus on the penitential theme which is found throughout the Vercelli Book, complemented by advice and instruction for good Christian living, and the consequences of going without this. The focus of these homilies is practical, advising on how to live according to Christian precepts, based on Christ’s teaching. Therefore, Christ is fundamental to the homilies, though not always mentioned explicitly. The Christological role most emphasised is that of teacher, though these homilies are not without a hint of warning about a dire future Judgement for those who do not live according to the teachings of Christ.

⁶⁴⁷ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 358 ‘the Lord’s face very horrible and terrible’.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 362, ‘light of all light’, ‘the eternal joy’, ‘the eternal brightness of all angels’, ‘the sweet love of all saints’.

III.

Vercelli III appears to be a penitential Lenten homily, and is a close translation of a popular Latin text, for which independent translations survive in two other texts, one (XX) in this collection. The homily exists in five surviving versions, all with transmitted errors. This translation was probably done in Canterbury, perhaps as late as the second half of the tenth century,⁶⁴⁹ from the Latin source found in Pembroke 25, item 22.⁶⁵⁰ Frantzen says that the summary of sacramental confession is based on the *Capitula* of Theodulf of Orléans.⁶⁵¹ The homily primarily focuses on the need for penance, with examples from the bible. Its portrayal of Christ is only ever in passing, but he is variously depicted as a teacher, a model, initiator of the sacrament of baptism, provider of hope in the afterlife, and importantly, as a member of the Trinity, and an object of love and veneration. The homily promotes the importance of faith in God, hope for eternal rewards and love of the divine and of neighbours. In baptism, as consecrated by the Son of God, we are brothers. We must dwell in love so that God dwells in us. After confession we must be penitent, and deeply grieve over our sins, as both Christ and John the Baptist advocated. Christ also taught that we need to be awake, presumably as we cannot know the time of the coming of the kingdom of Heaven: he was an example of this himself, ‘Be þære wæccan eac swylce se hælend þara to[h]lys[t]endra mod aweahte’.⁶⁵² The Saviour taught vigilance not only in words but in action, staying awake in a night of prayer, probably alluding to his vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane.⁶⁵³ Both Christ and the Old Testament figures give examples of the rewards that fasting and the atonement of sin earn, such as the redemption of the Israelites from slavery. The homily says that through Christ’s forty day fast ‘he oferswiððe þone wiðerwinnan, 7 him sona englas þenedon’.⁶⁵⁴ As the fasting of the apostles is also mentioned, this highlights the exemplary nature of Christ’s actions and the continuity of the Old and New Testaments, indicating that as continuing apostles the church should also follow his lead. While there is a very strong penitential focus, it is not unreasonable, and advises moderation, also advocating the need to tie penance in with almsgiving and prayers. Through the mention of baptism making us all brothers the idea of Christ as the foundation of the church is emphasised, and through the reference to confession the homilist shows the ongoing role of Christ within the church, as the forgiver of sins. Christ does not undo the teaching of the Old Testament, but continues in the same vein,

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁵¹ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 156.

⁶⁵² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 77, ‘About that vigil also the Saviour awakened the mind of the listeners’.

⁶⁵³ Mark 14.32 and Matthew 26.36.

⁶⁵⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 80, ‘he overcame the enemy, and angels immediately attended to him’.

with fasting still shown to be positive and effective. Since Christ performs penitential acts, even though he is God himself, the penance which the homilist is advocating seems perfectly reasonable, no matter how slight any member of the audience might think their sins. The drive of the homily is the church's continued health, with the focus on eternal life, the love of God and neighbour, and the importance of both almsgiving and prayer as a practical help for the church. Whether for the individual or group, Christ is the model and is foundational to this.

VII.

Vercelli VII is fairly short and has little to say about Christ's person. It promotes the need to follow the narrow way, which Christ had taught, in order to be holy. It is unique to this manuscript, and is an appeal to toil, harsh living and temperance, building on a series of parables and images, with Old Testament figures and references to the evil of idleness. It comes from an earlier manuscript as a block with homilies VIII, IX and X,⁶⁵⁵ and while Scragg assumed that it was a literal translation from Latin, he had not been able to identify the source,⁶⁵⁶ but Zacher has identified the homily as a close rendering of half of John Chrysostom's Homily XXIX. While Chrysostom's homilies are known to be anti-female, this is one of the most misogynistic passages in the Old English homilies, with the depiction of women being weak and susceptible to sin, due to their indoor lives. Zacher does not see the homily as exclusively directed to women, but open to a general audience.⁶⁵⁷ As with the homily above, it advocates fasting, saying that it is bad to live by indulging senses, as Christ and others warned in the scriptures.⁶⁵⁸ As an example, it refers obliquely to Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man of Luke 16: 19-31, that the rich man now suffers torments for his gluttony.⁶⁵⁹ The homilist says that gluttony fills the body with sickness; one should only eat for health and nourishment. By following the narrow way and showing restraint, one can earn and receive the good things promised by the Saviour Christ and the Holy Spirit. Following Christ's teaching in one's lifestyle leads directly to the rewards that he promised for 'Cristes þa gecorenan'.⁶⁶⁰ Through these few references, Christ is the basis for this homily, but without them it could equally be an instructional document on good living, removed from a Christian setting.

⁶⁵⁵ Scragg, 'Compilation of the Vercelli Book', p. 323.

⁶⁵⁶ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 133.

⁶⁵⁷ Zacher, 'Address to Women', pp. 99, 121 and 127.

⁶⁵⁸ Harbus, in 'Olehtung', p. 390, notes the unique use of the word here for indulgence, rather than flattery as is more common, and particularly that this occurs when the homilist is being most original.

⁶⁵⁹ It does not, however, claim that Lazarus is in Heaven.

⁶⁶⁰ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 134, 'Christ's chosen (ones)'.

XIV. *Larspel to swylcere tide swa man wile.*

Scragg believes that Vercelli XIV appears to be a part of a manuscript group including the preceding Rogationtide homilies, though stylistically and linguistically it is not linked to them, and despite its similar themes it is rubricated *Larspel to swylcere tide swa man wile*.⁶⁶¹ Scragg considers that '[t]his is a most competent and considered piece compiled by an author of learning and discernment'.⁶⁶² It is the only copy of this homily to have survived, though two sentences from it are also found in a Rochester manuscript, CCCC 303. The main theme is to make use of time in this world in order to be prepared for the next.⁶⁶³ Szarmach notes that the main sources of this homily are Caesarius of Arles and Book IV of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, but with Cambridge Pembroke 25 acting as an intermediary Latin text between Gregory and the Vercelli homilist, possibly coming from an unknown version of Paul the Deacon's homiliary.⁶⁶⁴ The homilist's use of Caesarius and Gregory is not close, with paragraphs added to reinforce his argument, and syntax is closer to Old English than Latin.⁶⁶⁵ The homilist uses the Pauline concept, extracted from a Caesarian source, that we are exiled from our heavenly home.⁶⁶⁶ Vickrey argues that as the homily's central Caesarian allusion to Heaven following commentary on the unjust steward is not explained, as it is by Ælfric, the person for whom it was intended must have been of some learning. He also argues that this passage supports the idea of the book as a *florilegium* for personal contemplative reading, rather than *lectio divina* as part of a community or public catechetical reading.⁶⁶⁷ The homily begins with a reminder of the holiness of the season, probably Rogationtide, and of God's generosity in giving us time to follow his teaching. The discussion moves to the opportunity to better ourselves, wary of the devil.⁶⁶⁸ The homily portrays the eucharist as being absolutely fundamental to Christian living. In it, God is recounted extending his mild-heartedness so that we might cherish the covenant and his teaching from when he 'licumlice on worulde wæs mid mannum',⁶⁶⁹ as we are exiled from him while we are alive on earth. Before we die, we need to daily send forth prayers, and the eucharist, 'ure onsægdnesse [his

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237. 'Sermon for whatever time one should wish'.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁶⁶⁴ Szarmach, 'Vercelli XIV and Paul the Deacon', pp. 76, 78-9. Szarmach also notes in 'Caesarius of Arles and the Vercelli Homilies', p. 318, that this Caesarian passage is also used in Vercelli XI, though from an unrelated transmission.

⁶⁶⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 237.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁷ Vickrey, 'Source and Allusion', p. 617.

⁶⁶⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 237.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239, 'bodily was in the world with men'.

lichaman] 7 his þæ[s] hal[gan] blod[es]’,⁶⁷⁰ to Almighty God. The eucharistic sacrifice also releases souls from torments, as the priest emulates the death of ‘[an]cennedan Godes suna’, who ‘fram deape arise æfter þam þe he for ealles mancynnes hælo deap þrowode 7 on heofenas eft upastah, þær he siððan a undeadlice ricsode on ecnesse þurh eallra worlda world’.⁶⁷¹ This happens again in the Eucharist, in the hearts of the faithful, for salvation and the pledge of eternal life. Heaven is revealed at the Eucharist, in the voice of the priest; similarly, angels stood by at the mystery – presumably the crucifixion – of the Lord Saviour Christ. The homilist says that so that our sins might be remitted, through the Eucharist we emulate the sufferings of the immortal king in Heaven. If the Creator Almighty God understands that our hearts are focused on him, he will accept our prayers and be merciful, though we also need to forgive others as he taught in his parables, as otherwise the Lord, the Heavenly King, the eternal ruler of all will seek out our good and bad deeds, reminding that Christ is not only the institutor of the sacrament but also the Judge. Life is a journey, during which one must not neglect the soul, as it cannot be redeemed by another man after death. Therefore, it is important to always think of our eternal life. Christ only wants the health of the soul, which is portrayed as a moderate thing compared to what he has done for humanity.

XXII.

Vercelli XXII is a unique piece of ‘spiritual contemplation modulating into homiletic injunction’. It is primarily adapted from Isidore’s *Synonyma*. While the translation is often close, it uses intelligent selection, so that Scragg concludes ‘[w]hat remains is a simpler and much more general exhortation to spiritual improvement such as is suitable for a monastic environment’.⁶⁷² As it is a contemplative text, this seems likely, though it could be read by anybody learned. Di Sciacca writes at length on the Isidorian style, arguing that the homilist assimilates and masters the source in order to be able to insert original contributions.⁶⁷³ She also notes its lack of *ubi sunt* topos, which does occur elsewhere in the Vercelli Book.⁶⁷⁴ The first part of the homily concerns the fate of the soul after death, followed by a direct injunction to avoid endangering the soul. This Isidorian text focuses more on God than on Christ in particular. The divine is portrayed as being far removed from humanity: God’s ways are not the world’s. He will punish people for their sins, but it is interesting to note that this is

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243, ‘our offering (his body) and his holy blood’.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242, ‘God’s [only] begotten Son’, ‘rose from death after he suffered death for the salvation of all mankind and afterwards rose into the Heavens, where he afterwards always ruled, immortal in eternity, through the world of all worlds’, i.e. in eternity.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁶⁷³ See Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, particularly ch. 4.

⁶⁷⁴ Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, pp. 135-6.

particularly applicable for those whom he wishes to lead to eternal life. He is angry about those who complain, but gracious to the patient. We need to remember our Maker, and that not only are we created, but in God's likeness; we are given souls, and are what God intended us to be. We need to be mindful of our own future, as Isidore said 'Hwi wenst ðu þæt oðres gastes hordfæt þe wile alysan gif ðu sylf nelt?'.⁶⁷⁵ We need to ask to be healed so that we can fulfil our duty, to serve him in the heavenly bridal chamber. We should not speak badly of Christ or listen to bad things being said; rather, we should invoke him in both words and deeds. God augments, judges, and is the Ruler. While he can be provoked to anger, he clothes, feeds, and protects us, and is merciful to us daily. Isidore's text puts responsibility for God's reactions on humanity, and without dwelling on Judgement gives a firm directive that people need to be aware of their own need and how to fulfil God's will. Christ is only mentioned directly as a name that should not be invoked, perhaps taking the homilist's own advice to the next level.

Homiletic Fragment I

The poem known as *Homiletic Fragment I* might also best be placed in this section, though of course the brevity of the surviving text limits the options. It has been examined very little, and Randle points out that it has only appeared in extended analysis three times in the past fifty years. He attempts to remedy this by describing its homiletics, judging that it shows the outward form of traditional vernacular verse, but that its 'inner qualities' show evidence of the prose homiletic tradition.⁶⁷⁶ Its focus is on the actions needed in order to be able to go to Heaven, suggesting the need to meet the requirements of a judgemental God. The poet pleads for his audience not to share the future torments of the sinful, and exhorts them to follow God's commands, by being peaceful and bearing spiritual love, striving to do better so that they might go to Heaven when God ends the life of the world. God is here a fairly generic and distant figure, but he does teach, and require a response, not entirely *deus ex machina*.

Summary

Throughout these homilies, God and Christ can be felt as the backdrop to the Christian teaching which the authors of the homilies are providing. However, Christ is seldom even used as an example, which indicates that Christian morality and guidance did not need to be explained by or tied to the scriptures, and that it could be used as a moral code as much as an

⁶⁷⁵ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 369, 'Why do you suppose that the treasure-vessel of that other spirit is willing to redeem you if you yourself do not wish it?'.
⁶⁷⁶ Randle, "'Homiletics" of Vercelli Book Poems', pp. 185-224.

aspect of religious worship. Of course, the instructions throughout are based on the need to follow God's commands in order to be able to be received in Heaven, and some of these homilies are closely linked to scripture and patristic traditions. Christ does, however, remain in the background as a point of reference, and it is his teachings, rather than his actions, which are at the core of these homilies.

Saints' Lives

Introduction

Only two of the prose texts of the Vercelli Book are hagiographic. The saints remembered are Martin, a particular favourite of the Anglo-Saxon church,⁶⁷⁷ and Guthlac, an English saint, who also has the leading role in two Old English poems. Both Martin and Guthlac are extreme ascetics, embodying the penitential lifestyle which is so important to the collector of the Vercelli homilies, with Martin depicting the ideal monastic life, and Guthlac that of a hermit. There are also, however, two hagiographic poems in the manuscript, *Andreas* and *Elene*, as well as the more general *Fates of the Apostles* and the pseudo-hagiographic *Dream of the Rood*. In the lives of both Martin and Andrew, Christ appears in disguise, and in both *Rood* and the life of Martin he appears in a dream. Christ characteristically gives agency to those whom he delegates to represent him: in both *Andreas* and the life of Guthlac he sends an apostle to the rescue of another saint, and *Elene* shows the empress taking on the responsibility of finding the cross. In *Rood*, the Dreamer is given responsibility by the Cross to proclaim the message of Christ's passion, which the Rood itself had done on Christ's behalf. *Fates* shows in summary what his closest followers endured on his behalf.

XVIII. De Sancto Martino Confessore

Martin is the model of the triumph of piety over worldly concerns, particularly the life of a soldier. The life of St Martin, recounted in Vercelli XVIII, is intended to be read at Martinmas. It is taken from Sulpicius Severus's *Vita sancti Martini* and other works, and survives in three versions, each of which has errors introduced during transmission.⁶⁷⁸ The Vercelli manuscript is missing two leaves and thus Scragg advises that it needs to be read in

⁶⁷⁷ The oldest church in continuous use in England is St Martin's in Canterbury, founded by King Æthelbert for his Christian wife Bertha, and later used by Augustine and his team of missionaries. St Martin's and St Paul's Parish Canterbury, 'St Martin's Church'.

⁶⁷⁸ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 289. See further discussions of *Martin* in the chapters on Ælfric and the Blickling homilies.

conjunction with the other manuscripts. He also suggests that it may be a literal translation of a lost intermediary Latin work. It draws selectively on its sources, with most attention on Martin's piety and miracle making, and only one intervention by the homilist, addressing the audience, drawing them back to the narrative of Martin's life.⁶⁷⁹ Martin's early and unwilling companionship with the thanes of the king set up his later purposeful companionship with his monks, thanes of the eternal King. As in the other Old English homilies on this subject, Martin is depicted as a type for Christ in many ways, in his compassion to the poor, turning to the church while still young, displaying extreme humility, bringing people back from the dead in order to enable them to go to Heaven, and destroying idols,⁶⁸⁰ yet the differences are also apparent. Unlike Christ, Martin is compelled to rebel against his parents' wishes in order to follow his calling. He does live in the world for a time as a soldier. It is his good works that make him particularly holy, and his humility and service to Christ and his people are strongly emphasised. He is steadfast, and even the account of his death, reconstructed from the Junius manuscript,⁶⁸¹ shows that he is not fooled by the devil and his tricks. His moral predicaments resound with his holiness and innocence: his impending death presents him with a conundrum, since though he longs to be with Christ he does not want to leave his people while they still need him. He wishes to die, but is concerned that he needs to keep working. Moreover, while still a soldier, he hesitates before giving half his cloak to a beggar, who later appears to him as Christ, who had 'hine sylfne geeaðmedde'⁶⁸² in order to give Martin this opportunity to show his compassion and goodwill. Martin himself remains humble despite being visited in person by Christ. He is not hesitant over whether to give away the cloak out of covetousness, but out of decency, as he has already given away all of his other garments: hence he divides it so that he might still be covered.⁶⁸³ The depiction of Martin's life and miracles emphasises that he is doing Christ's work for Christ's people, but Christ himself only plays an obvious part when he comes to Martin wearing his cloak, saying that Martin 'gecrisnod ær his fulwihte, he mid þysse hrægle me gegyrede', the biblical reference being picked up later in the passage: 'Swa hwæt swa ge hwylcum earmum men to gode gedop for minum naman, efne ge þæt me sylfum doð.'⁶⁸⁴ The Junius version concludes

⁶⁷⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 290.

⁶⁸⁰ c.f. Christ driving out spirits e.g. in Luke 8.27-34, also giving this ability to his apostles in Matthew 10.11.

⁶⁸¹ This section, missing from the Vercelli manuscript, is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 and 86.

⁶⁸² Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 295, 'humbled himself'.

⁶⁸³ This again reflects a difference from Christ, whose one garment was not separated but won by gambling (John 19.24).

⁶⁸⁴ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 295 'christened before his baptism, he with this garment clothed me' trans. in Nicholson 119 by Edman; 'Whatever good you do for every wretched man because of my name, that very

with Martin successfully confronting a devil, confirming his conquest over evil throughout his life, and the presumed acceptance into Heaven that should immediately follow his death. This final conflict with a devil can be likened to Christ's challenge in the Harrowing of Hell, before being able to go to Heaven himself. Martin's life presents a positive relationship with Christ, based on love of Christ and neighbour, focusing on compassion rather than the threat of Hell, though these do overlap when he rescues the unbaptised dead and gives them a second chance at salvation. Christ is crucial to this text, in its fundamental Christian message and through his parallels with Martin.

XXIII.

In the inverse of Martin, Guthlac is depicted as a monk first, who becomes a warrior for Christ.⁶⁸⁵ Two Old English poems, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, also recount the life of the saint, indicating his significance to the Anglo-Saxon psyche. Vercelli XXIII is a small excerpt from an Old English translation of Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, poorly transmitted, with an additional concluding sentence. This extract describes Guthlac's ascetic life, fight against despair, rejection of temptation, transportation by fiends to the gates of Hell, and delivery by Bartholemew.⁶⁸⁶ Though the extract itself is short, the compiler did not omit from it any of the original Latin text,⁶⁸⁷ while Olsen argues that this is the most exciting extract of the homily and suitable for attracting a lay audience. Salvation is depicted as a miraculous escape from damnation.⁶⁸⁸ Guthlac is associated with Crowland Abbey in the Cambridgeshire fens, his hermitage and place of ascetic exile. In his solitary exile, he is the centre of Vercelli XXIII, and he must respond to all the others, good or bad, who visit him as sent either by God or the devil. Guthlac's life is told with battle imagery: for instance, he is 'Cristes cempa'.⁶⁸⁹ He does fit the figure of a champion, fighting on Christ's behalf in the world, rather than as an independent warrior. While he is at his prayers, the devil attacks him, 'swa he of [ge]bendum bogan his costunge ða earhwinnendan stræle on þam mode gefæstnode þæs Cristes cempa',⁶⁹⁰ and Guthlac becomes troubled, unsure about his hermitage, and despairing when he remembers his sins. After three days he cries out to God in need, and God

[good] you do for me myself', cf. Matthew 25:40 'And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me'.

⁶⁸⁵ In Felix's eighth-century Latin life, however, Guthlac was a Mercian warrior before becoming a monk.

⁶⁸⁶ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 381.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁶⁸⁸ Olsen, 'Apotheosis', p. 34.

⁶⁸⁹ Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 384, 'Christ's champion'.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 'as if from the bent bow of his temptation he fastened in the mind of Christ's champion his despair-causing arrow'.

immediately sends Bartholomew to help him, so that Guthlac is not shot at again. Later when he meditates about how to live with humility for God, devils come to him, telling him how they tested him with their arrows, and give him advice on fasting, with examples of Moses, Elijah, Christ, ‘se hælend ealles middangeardes’,⁶⁹¹ and the desert fathers. They tell him to fast for six days so as to be raised up in God’s eyes. While their advice seems sound, Guthlac does not listen to them, but prays to God: ‘Min drihten God, syn mine fynd a onhinder gecyrred, for ðan ic þe on gite 7 gepence, for ðan þu eart min scyppend!’⁶⁹² He follows this by flatly ignoring the devils and eating the barley loaf, described as life-giving, both in the senses of earthly and eternal life. The devils are greatly upset, and a great number return for him, and drag him through fen and brambles, in a scene reminiscent of the torments done to Christ in the lead up to the crucifixion. The devils order him to leave his hermitage, for fear of further ordeals, but again Guthlac speaks resolutely of his faith, with a hint of champion imagery: ‘Dryhten me is on ða swiðran healfe; for ðam ic ne beo oncyrrred.’⁶⁹³ The devils punish him further and try to take him to Hell, in the north of Heaven,⁶⁹⁴ but while still alive he flies to Heaven with Bartholomew, and is received by the Saviour who lives and reigns there. Due to Christ’s lack of direct involvement, this homily shows that the saints fight for Christ on earth, as he is absent, not there to fight for himself, and as in *Andreas*, God sends those already with him in Heaven to assist his other saints. Guthlac’s need for help justifies all men needing help against the devil.⁶⁹⁵ Guthlac’s battles are spiritual, though with physical components, and while facing enemies he keeps focused on God rather than them, with his desire for Heaven, not Hell. In this way, as with Martin, it fits into the context of Judgement, with his championing Christ directly effecting the outcome of his ascent to Heaven.

Hagiographic poetry

As equally hagiographic texts, the poems *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Andreas* and *Elene* need to be discussed here, at least briefly. *The Fates of the Apostles*, as Bradley suggests, seems to be a brief versified martyrology, with the mnemonic list of the fates of the apostles perhaps intended to aid meditation.⁶⁹⁶ The poem emphasises that the twelve men (including Paul,

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 386 ‘the Saviour of all the earth’.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 387 ‘My Lord God, may my enemies be always turned behind (me), because I perceive and think on you, because you are my Creator!’.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 389 ‘The Lord is on my right side; therefore I will not be moved’, from both Psalm 16.8 and Acts 2.25.

⁶⁹⁴ In the Blickling Homily for the Feast of St Michael, Hell is also in the north, as discussed in note 216, and is built there by Lucifer in Vercelli XIX.

⁶⁹⁵ Olsen, ‘Apotheosis’, p. 36.

⁶⁹⁶ Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 154.

rather than Matthias, who replaces Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle in Acts 1.26) are chosen by the Lord, and are the Prince's servants, suggesting a retainer relationship. They are described in further military terms, 'frame, fyrdhwate',⁶⁹⁷ whose duty is to glorify and share the Lord's law, further indicating their subservient and loyal role. The image of *milites Christi* is in line with that of Guthlac and Martin, though as Dalbey has noted, it is in Ælfric's life of Martin, rather than the anonymous homilies, that he is truly *miles Christi*, with his role rather as a shepherd emphasised in the anonymous homilies.⁶⁹⁸ The individual relationships between Christ and some of the apostles is depicted, again suggesting that of the intimacy between a Germanic lord and his retainers, and both his love for them on earth and the way in which he empowers them, as well as the reward he will provide them for their service, in Heaven: for example, Thomas, exalted in spirit by the Lord, raises a king's brother from the dead, gives up his life to the sword, and seeks out Heaven. Cynewulf concludes with hope for a similar fate, dwelling in Heaven where the King of Angels pays eternal reward to the pure, suggesting that he sees himself as a latter-day apostle, spreading Christ's message and acting as a loyal retainer. This identification with the saints is typical of hagiographic texts, though the intimacy of his desire is more akin to the reaction of the Dreamer in *Rood*. In all this, Christ is the pivot, and the Lord of all his followers.

Andreas

Andreas uses the very distinctive device of Christ as the divine navigator, which is also evident in the Blickling Homily on St Andrew. While early scholars thought this was a slightly modified version of Woden,⁶⁹⁹ both the anchor and the fish were among the earliest images of Christ, and with the many biblical stories of Christ on boats and on water it does not seem necessary to draw pre-Christian parallels. He is a steersman in more than the physical sense, guiding Andrew in how to behave as well as taking him to his destination. Disguised as the navigator, he also tests Andrew's faith and understanding, and has him give examples from his time with Christ, on the lake of Galilee, in order to comfort his frightened followers, so that Andrew himself forgets his fear, 'for the man whose mind is engrossed in Christ, the tempest upon the ocean of this life is effectively stilled.'⁷⁰⁰ The calm that Christ provides Andrew with here stays with him throughout his trials, as evidence of the didactic

⁶⁹⁷ Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. 51, l.11, 'valiant, battle-brave'.

⁶⁹⁸ Dalbey, 'The Good Shepherd and the Servant of God', pp. 422-34.

⁶⁹⁹ Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 111.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

purpose of the poem, with a man learning from Christ's example and applying the lesson to his own life, and thus offering his own life as a lesson to the audience.⁷⁰¹

Andreas is likewise portrayed as a thane of the Lord, who has travelled as his Lord willed. He is once described as 'Cristes cempa', and once as 'wigan unslæw', both alluding to the *miles Christi* tradition.⁷⁰² The apostles here are willing to emulate Christ, with both Matthew and Andrew being tortured and imprisoned, though while Matthew asks God that he might not die, Andrew asks to be released from his torments by death. God uses his saint, Andrew, to save the life of his other saint, Matthew, seemingly with the primary purpose to be a test of faith and a witness, as he shows by his miraculous works that he is quite capable of doing anything on earth and desires, rather than needs, his saints to be his hands in the world.

The Lord's position is very definitely in Heaven: Andrew hears the voice of God from Heaven, and light comes into Matthew's cell with the voice of the 'heofonrices weard', which later departs 'to þam uplican / eðelrice'.⁷⁰³ Though when the Lord speaks with Matthew in his cell it is twenty-seven days before he should die, by the time he speaks to Andrew only three days of Matthew's allotted time remain. This is significant due to the implicit reference to Christ's death and resurrection, and also because this heightens the drama by making the impossibility of Andrew being able to do anything without divine assistance even greater. Disguised as the steersman, he tests Andrew further, warning him against Mermedonia, and asking him for a fee, to which Andrew gives the biblically correct answer that he was to take nothing with him on his mission.⁷⁰⁴ The steersman takes Andrew because of Christ, whom he professes to follow, and Andrew prays for blessings on the crew. The relationship between Andrew and the steersman develops, and as they sit together Andrew tells him that he is the best navigator he has ever seen, and would like both to be friends and to learn from him, who is young but wise.⁷⁰⁵

The faith of both of the apostles is rewarded by God's support, and the Lord tells Andrew he will not allow his trials to be more than he can bear, and that they will not kill him. He also reminds Andrew of his own suffering, raised up on the cross. He is always mindful of the apostles, and after four days Andrew is healed of his wounds. Conversely, the

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁰² Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. 30, l.991 'Christ's champion' and p. 50, l.1711 'active warrior'.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 4, l. 56, 'Guardian of the Heaven-kingdom' and p. 6, l. 119b-120a 'to the lofty homeland'.

⁷⁰⁴ Matthew 10.5-15.

⁷⁰⁵ Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. 16.

cannibal leaders have no regard for the Lord, and some are punished, though many are saved and converted, with those who died in the flood brought back to life. This differs from the Flood in Genesis, which shows, if it does not point out, God's consistency in saying that never again would there be such a great flood. Their distance from God is best illustrated in two instances of Christianity inverted: their cannibalism, eating human flesh, rather than taking in Christ's body spiritually, and in the acceptance by the people of the son offered to be eaten so that the father might be spared. The devil is shown to be active in Mermedonia, asking Andrew whether he has claimed for himself land and power, as his teacher did. He says that

Cyneþrym ahof,	þam wæs Crist nama,
ofer middangeard,	þynden hit meahte swa.
Pone Herodes	ealdre besnyðede,
forcom æt campe	cyning Iudea,
rices berædde,	ond hine rode befealg,
þæt he on gealgan	his gast onsende. ⁷⁰⁶

This draws imagery of Christ himself as a warrior, vanquished in battle, the negative version – coming from a negative source – of the young warrior mounting the Cross in *Rood*. The Cross, however, when it shines on Andrew's face, protects him from the devils, showing the true triumph of Christ crucified. The relationship between Christ and Andrew is central to this poem, with the former inspiring, teaching, being a role model, and ultimately saving his apostle.

Elene

Elene is described by Roberts as 'among the most shapely of Anglo-Saxon poems', and far more so than the anonymous prose hagiography.⁷⁰⁷ *Elene*, whilst indeed hagiographic, is more of a meditation on the significance of the cross, and the role of the Jews in the crucifixion, than it is on Helen herself, who is portrayed as a *miles Christi*, but not an intimate friend and disciple as is Andrew. The recognition of the Cross is a continual issue throughout the poem, and allows immediate freedom from the oppression of sin, and gives conviction to

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40, ll. 1322-7. 'He who was named Christ raised up his royal majesty over the earth, while it might be thus. Then he was deprived of his life by Herod, the king of Judea overcame him in battle, he deprived him of the kingdom, and stuck him to the cross, so that his sent forth his spirit on the gallows'.

⁷⁰⁷ Roberts, 'English Saints in Old English Anonymous Homilies', pp. 434 and 442.

the believer.⁷⁰⁸ The narrator of *Elene* shares some similarities with that of the dreamer in *Rood*: both are required to make known what has been revealed to them by Heaven. Conversion is a central theme in *Elene*, as highlighted by Sharma. Springing from this, Sharma also attributes redemptive powers to the cross, the lock imagery of which he believes represents the release of humanity from Hell.⁷⁰⁹ God gives Constantine victory in battle, because as instructed in a dream, he bears a cross on a standard before him. This symbol of spiritual victory provides secular victory, and so this new religion becomes an important part of his life. Unlike the saints, Constantine, converted, is still powerful and proud, and the nails of the cross are eventually put into his horse's bridle, in order to give him continued success, as indeed, the 'cyning ælmihtig' granted him 'domweorðunga, / rice under roderum, þurh his rode treo.'⁷¹⁰ Whilst it is Helen, rather than Constantine, who is the saint, her focus is almost as much on her son as it is on honouring the cross and Christ. With the cross at the heart of the poem, Christ crucified is the dominant image, though at the beginning of the poem there is a brief summary of the incarnation, as well as an appositive series of titles for God. Constantine's ignorance presents the perfect opportunity to explain the crucifixion, resurrection and redemption. Helen speaks harshly to the Jews of their role in the crucifixion, and tells them they have lost their status with God, and that they are cursed. Her ruthlessness in light of this viewpoint seems less unholy, though as she starves Judas in a pit for seven days in order to hear the location of the cross, she is closer to the powerful rulers who bring about martyrdoms, than to the martyred saints. Judas, though a Jew, is aware of the implications of the cross:

	ðam sigebeame
on ðam þrowode	þeoda waldend,
eallra gnyrna leas,	godes agen bearn,
þone orscyldne	eofota gehwylces
þurh hete hengen	on heanne beam
in fyrndagum	fæderas usse. ⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁸ Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 165.

⁷⁰⁹ Sharma, 'Reburial of the Cross', pp. 280 and 283.

⁷¹⁰ Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. 70, ll. 145b, 146b-147, 'almighty king', 'glory and power under the Heavens, through his rood-tree'.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77, ll. 420b-425, 'that victory-beam on which suffered the ruler of nations, deprived of all wrongs, God's own son, guiltless of every crime, whom our fathers through their hate hanged on the high beam in days of old'.

He warns that the discovery of the cross would herald the end of the power of the Jews, and the beginning of the power of those who follow the ‘ahangnan cyning’.⁷¹² Judas had been instructed by his father to convert at this time, but he remains stubborn until faced with starvation. When he does eventually agree to reveal to Helen the site of the cross, it becomes apparent that he does not know it himself, but his prayers are answered, and Christ’s cross is found and proven through miracles. In response to this, the devil complains that he has been done many injuries and cruel acts by the Saviour, who was nurtured in Nazareth. Cynewulf concludes the poem, mindful of the cross, and warning of Judgement when we will hear truth about our deeds and words from the Judge, and will pay the penalty, with three groups separated out. Ó’Carragáin believes Cynewulf’s advice to repent is consistent with the Vercelli Book as a whole, and the sequence of spiritual states suggests the dispositions with which one should read *Elene* and the rest of the collection.⁷¹³ This homiletic ending is unusual in the hagiography of the Vercelli Book, showing the role of the narrator as well as the importance of the content, and as with *Rood*, passing on the responsibility of sharing the story to the reader and auditors.⁷¹⁴

Dream of the Rood

The Cross of Christ, whilst usually inanimate and inarticulate, is nonetheless venerated by the church as ‘Holy Cross’, or ‘Sancta Crux’, with the same title as that given to a human or angelic saint. Thus, it is not too much of a leap to put the *Dream of the Rood* in the context of hagiography, especially when the Rood in this case is both animate and articulate. The poem is homiletic in style, and Horgan has noted similarities with an unpublished Palm Sunday homily.⁷¹⁵ Szarmach places *Rood* within the *visio* genre of Latin literature,⁷¹⁶ which is also prominent throughout the anonymous homilies of the Vercelli Book. Because of this, what might otherwise seem unnatural is possible, and this homiletic poem can be read in the context of the dreams, so important for revelation from God in the Bible, such as those of Jacob’s son Joseph and Mary’s husband Joseph, in Genesis 37 and Matthew 1 and 2. The depiction of Christ in *Rood* is by no means new territory, particularly in light of Éamonn Ó Carragáin’s extensive work,⁷¹⁷ but some aspects are worth briefly highlighting. *Rood* is read by nearly every undergraduate student of Old English, so its image of the heroic Christ and

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, p. 78, l. 453a ‘hanged king’.

⁷¹³ Ó’Carragáin, ‘Cynewulf’s Epilogue to Elene’, pp. 187 and 199.

⁷¹⁴ This tradition comes from Isidore, and also occurs in Homily III, according to Ó’Carragáin, in ‘Cynewulf’s Epilogue to Elene’, p. 190

⁷¹⁵ Horgan, ‘Rood and a Homily’, p. 388.

⁷¹⁶ Szarmach, ‘Prose Vision’, p. 327.

⁷¹⁷ For instance, Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*.

the anthropomorphic cross can lose their effect, but it is striking in the context of the Vercelli Book how unique it is, even within its immediate setting. Christ is more important to this poem than he is in nearly all of the Vercelli homilies. As Heckman notes, the emphasis is on his strength and courage, rather than the cruelty of his persecutors, which might have been transferred to the audience.⁷¹⁸ In a slightly broader Anglo-Saxon setting, Karkov associates *Rood* with the image of blood from Christ's wound and the tendrils from the cross which can be seen in the tenth- or eleventh-century Red Book of Darley (CCCC 422, containing *Solomon and Saturn* and a mixture of liturgical materials), and even suggests that the Red Book 'in drawing the reader to Christ, the Word made flesh,... asks him to picture himself as text, the flesh made word', suggestive of the interplay between physicalities in *Rood*.⁷¹⁹ All the same, the Cross's role in shadowing Christ is another way for the collector of the Vercelli Book to portray the need to draw close to Christ and emulate him, in order ultimately to reach the heavenly homeland. Orchard suggests that the addition of 'geong hæleð' (young hero) to *Rood*, not on the Ruthwell Cross, shows the concern to fully identify the divine and human aspects of Christ.⁷²⁰ The cross not only represents Christ, but, as Ó Carragáin suggests, the crucifixion is depicted in terms of the Annunciation, i.e. with the cross taking on the passively willing role of Mary, giving a strong Mariological bent to a clearly Christological text.⁷²¹ Christ approaches the Cross willingly, and eagerly, as is also indicated in the homily on the Epiphany, in order to save us, and to draw us to him now and forever. Affective piety and compunction are present, rather than a fear of Judgement.

Summary

Thus, the hagiography of the Vercelli Book, particularly the prose hagiography, does rely more on its images of the saints than it does on their Lord. Nonetheless, this range of texts does contribute to the broader representation of Christ. Martin and Guthlac are two very different saints, one directly involved in the world, and one a hermit. Martin both heals people and fights demons, whereas Guthlac is shown only in his contest with the devils. Faith in God is central for both, but whereas Martin's acts of compassion, turning from military action, show a more affective spirituality, for Guthlac, weaponry, conflict, and the ultimate outcome are at the forefront. Martin preserves both himself and others from a negative final Judgement, and Guthlac's faith also enables him to be saved, both showing the need to be

⁷¹⁸ Heckman, '*Imitatio*', p. 143.

⁷¹⁹ Karkov, 'Text and Image in the Red Book of Darley', pp. 142 and 148.

⁷²⁰ Orchard, 'Cross-References', p. 241.

⁷²¹ Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*, ch. 2 *passim*.

always doing God's will and the strength with which one can face adversity and follow Christ. This is a model for a church also focused on Christ but facing adversity in the world, with the two saints inspirational both for a prayerful and penitential life, and for the need to give alms with compassion. The hagiographic poems in this manuscript have a different focus: there is less emphasis on the applicability of the saints' actions for the audience, as the settings are so deliberately exotic, as are the tasks God appoints. These saints show the deep faith set in the challenging times of the early church, and their more militant depictions suggest an image of Christ as a triumphant battle leader. The Rood is the ultimate saint, as the closest to Christ, and undergoing everything with him before trying to use its experience to convert others. Both human saints bring about a change of heart in others and draw them closer to Christ, Elene by causing suffering to the descendants of those who caused Christ to suffer, and Andrew by suffering himself, reminded by Christ of how he also had suffered for others. Elene indeed seems vindictive in her focus on Christ in Judgement, with little evidence of compassion despite being a convert herself; in *Andreas*, God is kinder, sparing sacrificial victims, and restoring to life those heathens who had died in the flood. Christ is the inspiration and ultimate model for all of these saints, but his role is from the sidelines rather than as a leading actor.

Conclusion

Given the diverse range of texts and authors, it is not at all surprising to conclude that the Vercelli homilies cannot be claimed to reveal a clearcut Christology, let alone one that might be able to encompass grassroots conceptions of Christ before the work of Ælfric. Most of the homilies focus on the audience and their necessary response to Christ's teaching and saving acts, but keeping the role of Christ himself minimal. This extends to one of the more distinctive features of Christ in these homilies: his passivity. He is nearly never seen to take decisive action on his own behalf, either in his human existence or as Judge at Doomsday. Rather, he fulfils requirements and responds to those around him. The notable exceptions are his determination to be baptised in the Epiphany homily, going into far more detail than the corresponding gospel texts, and of course his active, though accepting, role in *Rood*. Christ overlaps considerably with God and corresponding to this is a far greater interest in his divinity than his humanity. Christ, through his teachings and acts, is the basis of these homilies, but within them he is little more than a background figure to the prominent injunctions to repentance.

CHAPTER IV

WE GELYFON ON ÐONE ANCENNEDAN GODES SUNU, HÆLEND CRIST, ÞONE ÐE SE ÆLMIHTIGA FÆDER FOR URE ALYSEDNYSSE ASENDE: THE HOMILIES OF ÆLFRIC

Introduction

Ælfric

Ælfric, abbot of Eynsham, is the best known and most respected of the late Anglo-Saxon prose writers. He lived from about 950 to 1010 AD.⁷²² He was educated and became a monk at Winchester, whence in about 987 he moved to the monastery of Cerne Abbas, in Dorset, possibly to educate the monks about the Benedictine Rule.⁷²³ In about 1005 he was appointed abbot of the new abbey at Eynsham in Oxfordshire.⁷²⁴ Ælfric was a mass-priest, and most likely a school master, before becoming abbot.⁷²⁵ He has been described as ‘probably the best-educated man in England of his day’.⁷²⁶ Indeed, he corresponded with Wulfstan between 1002 and 1006, filling in the bishop on points of theology of which he was uncertain.⁷²⁷

Throughout his career, Ælfric produced three series of forty homilies, namely the two series of *Catholic Homilies* and the *Lives of the Saints*, as well as a number of other individual homilies; biblical commentaries and paraphrases; a grammar, glossary and colloquy; various significant pastoral letters; and a version of Bede’s Latin *De Temporibus Anni*.⁷²⁸ Lees has noted that of all the Old English homilists it is only Ælfric who directly attaches his name to his work, with Wulfstan preferring to use his cognomen, *Lupus*.⁷²⁹ Partly because of the certainty regarding his corpus, as well as the quality of his work, Ælfric is justly renowned as the most skilful and most prolific writer of the late Anglo-Saxon period, and has been a popular focus of Anglo-Saxon studies for some time. In 1912 Gem argued that

⁷²² Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxi.

⁷²³ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 32.

⁷²⁴ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxi.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁶ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 31.

⁷²⁷ Godden, ‘Wulfstan and Ælfric’, p. 373.

⁷²⁸ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxi.

⁷²⁹ Lees, ‘Patristic Sources’, p. 167.

‘[h]e has a message for the present day and for ourselves, for still, after nine hundred years, three of our pressing needs are Christian Education, Temperance, and Home Defence’.⁷³⁰ Whether or not this view is still relevant, interest in Ælfric has certainly not declined, with excellent editions of all of his homilies now published.

Because Ælfric was such a prolific writer, and because his theology has already been thoroughly examined, this chapter will focus on a more sweeping overview of his Christology, examining key motifs and ideas, and the way Ælfric integrates Christ within the Old and New Testaments, rather than on every role Christ has to play in Ælfric’s homilies. So much material is available that that could be a thesis in itself, but I believe less useful than examining him in relation to his close contemporaries.

Homiletic Texts

Ælfric’s homilies, in particular, have been discussed a great deal. Gatch has claimed that ‘[t]he chief innovation [in Old English homiletic writing]... is Ælfric’s notion that one might arrange coherent collections of vernacular, exegetical homilies for the liturgical year’.⁷³¹ Lees’s not contradictory perspective is that ‘Ælfric is exemplary only to the extent that he rationalizes and maintains the preaching mission more systematically than any other vernacular writer’.⁷³² Wrenn argued that ‘Ælfric’s strength as a homilist – and this is true too of his prose style – lies in the blending of plain rational argument, in the simplest and most natural language, with a sincerely felt and moving devotion, and a sense of divine mysteries which draw faith but transcend full human understanding’.⁷³³ In this chapter I will be focusing primarily on the *Catholic Homilies*, most recently edited by Peter Clemoes and Malcolm Godden, and earlier edited and translated by Benjamin Thorpe,⁷³⁴ as well as the additional homilies edited by John C. Pope and mostly translated by Carmen Butcher.⁷³⁵ I will not be examining Ælfric’s *Lives of the Saints*, as his hagiography is already represented to a certain extent within the *Catholic Homilies*, and to focus on this collection as well would create too much of an imbalance with the other homilists.

⁷³⁰ Gem, *Anglo-Saxon Abbot*, pp. xii-xiii.

⁷³¹ Gatch, ‘Achievement of Ælfric’, p. 43.

⁷³² Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 111.

⁷³³ Wrenn, *Study of Old English*, p. 232.

⁷³⁴ The numbering of the second series homilies changes from the publication of Benjamin Thorpe’s edition and translation, in which he counted forty-five separate homilies, to Malcolm Godden’s edition, which counts forty homilies. Both editions have ‘double homilies’ on some days, but with Godden’s this is more pronounced. I have categorised the homilies according to the first one presented on these days.

⁷³⁵ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies I*; Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*; Thorpe, *Homilies*; Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*; Butcher, *God of Mercy*. Thorpe and Butcher’s translations will be used, unless indicated otherwise.

The *Catholic Homilies* were an ambitious project, intended, according to Ælfric in his Preface to the first series, to translate the ‘godspellican lare’ from Latin into English, in order to provide people with ‘godre lare’ so that they might withstand the ‘toweardan costnunge’, and to fulfil his duty as one of God’s teachers.⁷³⁶ Clemoes describes the *Catholic Homilies* as ‘two series of liturgical homilies combining *Temporale* and *Sanctorale*’.⁷³⁷ Godden proposes that Ælfric worked around the liturgical calendar, but also chose certain additional feast days and topics for sermons in a deliberate plan for his programme of teaching.⁷³⁸ According to Hill, Ælfric was ‘extending to the secular Church the standards of homiletic writing that he knew in Latin within the reformed monastic context. In so doing, he placed himself firmly within the Frankish traditions to which the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform was heir’.⁷³⁹ She has also argued that his choice to include or exclude homilies for certain days shows his authority, though, when they were added by others later on, his authority diminished.⁷⁴⁰ All the same, Wulfstan modelled some of the content and form of his homilies on Ælfric,⁷⁴¹ showing the immediate usefulness of his writing.

The *Catholic Homilies* were issued in two series, which Ælfric regarded as separate collections.⁷⁴² Earlier manuscripts preserve the divisions between Ælfric’s series, but later ones blur them, and eventually combine them with other authors.⁷⁴³ The homilies span forty days over a two year period, the first series covering fifteen Sundays, ten saints’ days and fifteen other feast days, and the second series sixteen Sundays, fifteen saints’ days and nine additional feast days. The first series begins by encompassing the chronological tale of salvation history, starting with creation, and later goes on to Christ’s ministry.⁷⁴⁴ The second series tells more of the stories of the Old Testament than the first.⁷⁴⁵ Godden suggests that the more important saints were covered in the first series.⁷⁴⁶ Both series cover Christmas (I.2 and II.1), St Stephen (I.3 and II.2), Epiphany (I.7 and II.3), the first Sunday of Lent (I.11 and II.7), Mid-Lent Sunday (I.12 and II.12), Palm Sunday (I.14 and II.14), Easter Sunday (I.15, II.15 and II.16), and the Assumption of Mary (I.30 and II.29). Of these eight, most are very

⁷³⁶ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies I*, pp. 174-5, 177; Thorpe, *Homilies*, I, pp. 3, 5, 9, ‘evangelical doctrines’, ‘good instruction’, ‘future temptation’.

⁷³⁷ Clemoes, ‘Chronology’, p. 37.

⁷³⁸ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxvii.

⁷³⁹ Hill, ‘Ælfric’s Manuscript’, p. 70.

⁷⁴⁰ Hill, ‘Reform and Resistance’, p. 39.

⁷⁴¹ Godden, ‘Wulfstan and Ælfric’, p. 373.

⁷⁴² Clayton, ‘Homiliaries and Preaching’, p. 176.

⁷⁴³ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 44.

⁷⁴⁴ Godden, *Introduction*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

important feast days, but it is interesting also to note the inclusion of St Stephen's feast and the Lenten homilies, especially as, due to the changing date of Easter, it could be difficult to fit in a fixed number of homilies after the Christmas season.⁷⁴⁷ Many of the other repeated homilies were synchronised so that over the two years, whilst the readings would not change, different ones would be preached upon.

Ælfric's later *Temporale* homilies were made up of the *Catholic Homilies* without saints' lives, and the other supplementary homilies for the Proper of the Season, which were edited by Pope.⁷⁴⁸ Ælfric did not do so much recycling of his material as did Wulfstan, but he did at times adjust his opinions about his writing, such as when, ten years after completing the *Catholic Homilies*, he added a text for Mary's nativity.⁷⁴⁹ The *Temporale* may have been collected together either by Ælfric or later on.⁷⁵⁰ These extra homilies change character, no longer designed for the lay congregation and using monastic material more.⁷⁵¹ Pope included a number of other 'occasional' homilies in his edition. These pieces enabled Ælfric to expand his instructions, and synthesise themes such as Creation, the Fall, Redemption and Judgement, and therefore are important in this analysis.⁷⁵²

Audience

Ælfric wrote generally for the Anglo-Saxon kingdom and church.⁷⁵³ Upchurch has said '[u]ndoubtedly he imagined God speaking to Anglo-Saxon Christians through his homilies and hagiography'.⁷⁵⁴ Ælfric considered homilies didactically useful, and 'a proper subject for precise and learned consideration'.⁷⁵⁵ The exact identity of the original audience Ælfric envisaged for the *Catholic Homilies* is unsure. The purpose of the *Homilies* was not conversion, but to strengthen faith.⁷⁵⁶ In his Preface he says he is writing in response to the pleas of the laity.⁷⁵⁷ By writing in English, he makes the Latin authors accessible for a vernacular audience.⁷⁵⁸ These texts were dedicated to Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury,

⁷⁴⁷ Hill, 'Ælfric's Manuscript', p. 84.

⁷⁴⁸ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 187.

⁷⁴⁹ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 245.

⁷⁵⁰ Teresi, 'Ælfric's or Not?', pp. 296 and 303.

⁷⁵¹ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 188.

⁷⁵² Clemoes, 'Chronology', p. 55.

⁷⁵³ Stafford, 'Church and Society', p. 22.

⁷⁵⁴ Upchurch, 'Homiletic Contexts', p. 284.

⁷⁵⁵ Hill, 'Ælfric's Use of Etymologies', p. 313.

⁷⁵⁶ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 11.

⁷⁵⁷ Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, p. 131.

⁷⁵⁸ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 19.

who commissioned them, and would have also received them for copying.⁷⁵⁹ Godden argues that there is no evidence that Ælfric composed these homilies for his own preaching, probably preferring to work from notes himself.⁷⁶⁰ This seems a reasonable assumption, as it is not with his own orthodoxy that Ælfric is concerned, but how others might misinterpret his teachings. However, he did not expect priests to individually own homiliaries.⁷⁶¹ Ælfric was regarded as an authority figure in the eleventh century, and his sermons were the basis of new collections, so must have been easily accessible in monastery libraries for both his contemporaries and followers.⁷⁶² Godden suggests that while the *Homilies*' primary audience was 'the laity and their ill-educated preachers', they also reflect 'the specialist concerns of monks, the clergy and the more learned'.⁷⁶³ They would have been able to be used in Sunday masses and for feast days in order both to translate the gospel, or sometimes other readings of the day, and to expound them.⁷⁶⁴ The *Catholic Homilies* could have been used in services where laymen were present, such as Sunday Mass and feast days. They would have been read aloud in church and at the Night Office, and they were probably used for private reading.⁷⁶⁵ The supplementary homilies, on the other hand, were probably aimed primarily at monks and the secular clergy, and were less likely to be accessed by laymen.⁷⁶⁶

Style

Ælfric is very well known for his accomplished prose style, especially his later innovations with rhythmical prose, known as the alliterative style. This was made up of two-stress phrases linked through alliteration, modelled on the Old English poetic style, but with the vocabulary and syntax of prose.⁷⁶⁷ He used this style throughout the second series and subsequent writing, including his *Lives of the Saints*, though there is only one instance of it in the first series.⁷⁶⁸ The debate about the prosaic or poetic style of the homilies has led to them sometimes being published in verse lines, as in Pope's edition. Wrenn praised Ælfric's style, saying that he is 'the first English writer to produce didactic prose whose style and literary art makes it still an aesthetic pleasure to read'.⁷⁶⁹ He may have been trying to develop an English

⁷⁵⁹ Teresi, 'Ælfric's or Not?', p. 298.

⁷⁶⁰ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxv.

⁷⁶¹ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 42.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁶³ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxvi.

⁷⁶⁴ Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homilies', p. 221.

⁷⁶⁵ Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', pp. 177-8.

⁷⁶⁶ Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homilies', p. 221.

⁷⁶⁷ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxxvi.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

⁷⁶⁹ Wrenn, *Study of Old English*, p. 225.

style equivalent to good Latin prose.⁷⁷⁰ Millett has suggested that the purity and correctness of his prose reflects his concern for doctrinal purity, while showing the same stylistic influences as his predecessors.⁷⁷¹ The straightforward style of Ælfric's syntax takes scripture as its model.⁷⁷² He preferred to use statements rather than rhetorical questions.⁷⁷³ He cut back Augustinian style, and reduced wordplay and imagery, as well as first person transitional phrases and hortative exclamations;⁷⁷⁴ Nichols describes Ælfric as 'preacher', simpler than Augustine as 'teacher'.⁷⁷⁵ Ælfric's homilies were not written with a 'positioned' voice: for long stretches they do not use first person pronouns, which gives the content of his homilies more unquestionable authority.⁷⁷⁶ Green claims that through the use of the second person, Ælfric is able to regard his audience both as individuals and as a group.⁷⁷⁷ Tandy has argued that Ælfric's writing style was self-aware, for example in his differentiation of verbs, based on the inceptive and durative nature of soulless things, compared to people and angels, again compared to God.⁷⁷⁸

Adaptation of sources

Bately has said that '[i]t is probably safe to describe as one of Ælfric's major achievements the way in which he has succeeded in distilling the wisdom of the church fathers to produce what are to all intents and purposes his own literary creations, while not departing from the 'sense' of his authorities'... 'nor forgetting that one of his aims is to write "for the edification of the simple"'.⁷⁷⁹ He attempted to do this without thought of any originality or new intellectual departure, claiming only to be a translator.⁷⁸⁰ His distilled writing in turn became a 'quarry' from which others selected parts for their own use.⁷⁸¹

Although Ælfric makes his homilies impersonal by avoiding first person pronouns, Hill describes Ælfric as deliberately cultivating an authorial persona, in the sense of being a voice of authority.⁷⁸² Lees argues that Ælfric's prefaces do 'not identify him with modern ideas of authorship, but with those associated with the patristic concept of an "auctor", whose

⁷⁷⁰ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 126.

⁷⁷¹ Millett, 'Change and Continuity', p. 224.

⁷⁷² Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 60.

⁷⁷³ Nichols, 'Methodical Abbreviation', p. 160.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9 and 161.

⁷⁷⁵ Nichols, 'Methodical Abbreviation', p. 163.

⁷⁷⁶ Swan, 'Constructing Preacher and Audience', p. 184.

⁷⁷⁷ Green, *Anglo-Saxon Audiences*, pp. 48-9.

⁷⁷⁸ Tandy, 'Verbal Aspect', p. 188.

⁷⁷⁹ Bately, 'Nature of Old English Prose', p. 80.

⁷⁸⁰ Wrenn, *Study of Old English*, pp. 225-6.

⁷⁸¹ Szarmach and Huppé, *Old English Homily*, p. 4.

⁷⁸² Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 20.

work as writer and translator has the authority of tradition and thus commands respect and obedience', hence his concern for theological accuracy, the avoidance of error, and accurate copying.⁷⁸³ Wrenn claimed that Ælfric 'sought to make available in direct, simple, and often rhetorically attractive language the teaching of the Church and those "evangelical doctrines" which were not to be had in English. He translated and adapted from the great Doctors of the Church homiletic guidance and scholarly exegesis: and always without thought of any originality or new intellectual departure'.⁷⁸⁴ This is largely true, and yet, whether or not he acknowledged it to himself, Ælfric's homilies do show a certain quality through his arrangements of texts and the way he modified them to suit his purposes so as to be far from merely direct translations of the patristic authors.

Lees has said that 'Ælfric is not only rewriting what is now perceived as the "earlier" anonymous tradition, but is also prescribing orthodox Benedictine practice'.⁷⁸⁵ However, Ælfric's standards were more rigorous than those of the Benedictine reformers at Winchester.⁷⁸⁶ Clayton contends that 'his stance is not at all self-evidently a reflection of reform thinking'.⁷⁸⁷ Ælfric attempted to reform the use of preaching and to purify its content,⁷⁸⁸ though his ideas never gained general acceptance.⁷⁸⁹ He reasserted tradition through the Fathers, rather than the apocryphal sources.⁷⁹⁰ Frantzen describes him as the Anglo-Saxon church's 'most important synthesizer of continental sources', both pivotal in the Reform and one of the products of the Reform.⁷⁹¹

Ælfric distanced himself somewhat from his Anglo-Saxon literary heritage. He was unimpressed by the ideological and religious possibilities offered by heroic tradition of poetry.⁷⁹² He did not see it meshing with Christian tradition, which he wished to present in a pure form.⁷⁹³ Ælfric may have been familiar with the homilies of the Blickling and Vercelli Books, and in his Preface to the first series certainly objected to religious writing revealing *gedwyld*, 'error', or, in a theological context, even 'heresy'.⁷⁹⁴ However, Godden suggests

⁷⁸³ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 125.

⁷⁸⁴ Wrenn, *Study of Old English*, p. 225.

⁷⁸⁵ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 31.

⁷⁸⁶ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 33.

⁷⁸⁷ Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 263.

⁷⁸⁸ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 122.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷⁹⁰ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 34.

⁷⁹¹ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 142.

⁷⁹² Magennis, 'Ælfric and Heroic Literature', p. 33.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

⁷⁹⁴ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies I*, p. 174.

that this was less to do with their theology and more about their use of ‘fictitious sensational narratives of dubious morality’.⁷⁹⁵ Ælfric was also critical of hagiographic sources.⁷⁹⁶ Godden believes that ‘[i]t must have been the existence of written collections of homilies in the vernacular in England that prompted Ælfric to devote his major literary efforts to [the homiletic] form rather than to translating major texts like Alfred or to writing in Latin’.⁷⁹⁷ While he objected to texts such as the *Visio Pauli*, he does use some exemplary visions,⁷⁹⁸ showing the care with which he assessed the quality of the sources to hand. He cites a number of his authorities throughout the Catholic Homilies, albeit picking and choosing who to use and when, moderating his sources and adding commentary.⁷⁹⁹ For Ælfric, complete loyalty to Christ required complete submission to orthodox tradition.⁸⁰⁰ Yet, some of his writing, such as for Rogationtide, has no known source, and is probably based on liturgy.⁸⁰¹ Occasionally he accidentally used apocryphal sources, such as a Pelagian text that was transmitted erroneously under Jerome’s name, and therefore seemed trustworthy.⁸⁰² Sometimes where he wants to imitate the authorities he is drawn away by later traditions.⁸⁰³

Gatch argues that the major difference between Ælfric, his forerunners and his successors, is in his sources and methodological principles. Ælfric used the collections of the continental monastic reformers, who transmitted the writings of the Fathers.⁸⁰⁴ As well as Haymo and Smaragdus, Ælfric was particularly reliant on the homiliary of Paul the Deacon, which included most of his patristic sources.⁸⁰⁵ This anthology included 151 *sermones* and ninety-one *omeliae*, sometimes with both for one feast day.⁸⁰⁶ It was a liturgically organised selection, covering the whole church year.⁸⁰⁷ While Ælfric also composed his homilies according to the liturgical year, he seems to have selected particular feasts and subjects so as to present a deliberate programme of teaching.⁸⁰⁸ He shows his own idiosyncrasies, for instance that no preaching should be done within Holy Week: Ælfric says that ‘Circlice

⁷⁹⁵ Godden, ‘Ælfric and the Vernacular’, pp. 100 and 102.

⁷⁹⁶ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 14.

⁷⁹⁷ Godden, ‘Ælfric and the Vernacular’, p. 106.

⁷⁹⁸ Szarmach, ‘Ælfric, the Prose Vision’, pp. 324, 333-4.

⁷⁹⁹ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, pp. 168, 170 and 171.

⁸⁰⁰ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 104.

⁸⁰¹ Harris, ‘Liturgical Context’, p. 144.

⁸⁰² Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, p. 196.

⁸⁰³ Kabir, *Paradise*, p. 48.

⁸⁰⁴ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 103.

⁸⁰⁵ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 45.

⁸⁰⁶ Smetana, ‘Paul the Deacon’, p. 79.

⁸⁰⁷ Hill, ‘Ælfric’s Manuscript’, p. 70.

⁸⁰⁸ Godden, *Introduction*, p. xxvii.

ðeawas forbeodað to secgenne ænig spel on þam þrym swig-dagum'.⁸⁰⁹ Hill has pointed out that Smaragdus, Paul the Deacon and Haymo all transmit homilies for this occasion, showing Ælfric's innovation here in not doing so.⁸¹⁰ Later compilers supplemented his collections, ignoring his wishes.⁸¹¹ Similarly, his objections to unscriptural Marian sources seem to have been without any Latin foundation.⁸¹²

Ælfric's use of the Fathers was wide-ranging, as can be seen by the number of sources in Godden's commentary on the homilies.⁸¹³ Ælfric himself in his Latin *Preface* acknowledged a debt to Bede, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome.⁸¹⁴ He mostly translated or adapted the work of the 'most reputable' of the patristic authors, trying not to repeat himself too much, and referring his readers to other works.⁸¹⁵ Though the ideas may not have been original, the result was.⁸¹⁶ He made the most of his great pool of sources, and Szarmach has argued that in his second series homily for Palm Sunday, which recounts all of Holy Week, 'Ælfric's freedom to range over several sources and to select from them also leads to an advantage for the shape and structure of the Passion narrative', and he 'becomes in effect another Gospel-writer conveying, more openly, the Christian message'.⁸¹⁷

Ælfric's use of New Testament texts

Whilst on the whole Ælfric followed the scriptural selections of his predecessors and the liturgical calendar, at times he does make independent decisions. As he himself claims that his work is derivative,⁸¹⁸ these choices are significant in looking at his independent theology and Christology.

Ælfric was cautious with the scriptural material he translated, for fear people should think it acceptable to live with the morality of the people in Genesis.⁸¹⁹ He usually worked with three of the four theoretical layers of meaning in his exegesis: the literal, typological and tropological, often leaving out the anagogical.⁸²⁰ Godden comprehensively goes through Ælfric's sources and the texts he chooses to expound in response to the liturgical calendar

⁸⁰⁹ Thorpe, *Homilies*, I, pp. 218-9, 'Church customs forbid any sermon to be said on the three still days'.

⁸¹⁰ Hill, 'Ælfric's "Silent Days"', p. 119.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸¹² Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 262.

⁸¹³ Godden, *Introduction*.

⁸¹⁴ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies I*, p. 173.

⁸¹⁵ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 14-5.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸¹⁷ Szarmach, 'Earlier Homily', pp. 391-2.

⁸¹⁸ Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies I*, p. 174.

⁸¹⁹ Bately, 'Nature of Old English Prose', p. 79.

⁸²⁰ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 93.

and the cycle of readings.⁸²¹ Whilst he mostly keeps to the readings of the day, primarily focusing on the gospel, on occasion he diverges. Sometimes he focuses on the epistle of the day instead, and at other times on a reading, either used by one of his sources or of his own choice. For example, I.22 focuses on the events of Pentecost, rather than the gospel for the day (John 14.23-31, Christ talking about his imminent departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit). It bases its theme on the more appropriate epistle of the day, Acts 2.1-11, which describes Pentecost itself, and continues to discuss the early church. The following homily, I.23, for the second Sunday after Pentecost, uses Luke 16.19-31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, as its text, rather than Luke 14.16ff., the story of people rejecting the invitation to the banquet and the poor being invited instead, which was used in Paul the Deacon's original homiliary. These two stories have superficially similar themes, with the poor and helpless being shown to be more worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom than the wealthy. However, the focus on Lazarus is more explicitly about the poor, and enables Ælfric to discuss the relationship of the rich and poor to one another, rather than just their relationship to God. It also introduces a pointedly moral tone, and is more explicitly about the afterlife.

Similarly, I.25 on the Nativity of John the Baptist uses as its texts Luke 1.5-17 (the story of the angel bringing the news of John's conception to Zechariah and Elizabeth) and Luke 3.1-4 (John going out into the desert and proclaiming the coming of Christ), rather than the usual Luke 1.57-68 (the birth and naming of John the Baptist). This enables Ælfric to speak about the significance of John's nativity in relation to that of Mary and Christ, as well as the importance of an ascetic life. For the decollation of John the Baptist, Ælfric uses the text marked for the day in the Old English gospels, that is Mark 6.17-29, rather than that in his most common source, Paul the Deacon's homiliary, which is Matthew 14.1-12. The two synoptic texts are analogous, with Herod shown as foolish for making an unconditional promise to a woman, though the text from Mark vilifies Herodias more and shows Herod himself to be interested in John's message.

Godden points out that the First Series is lacking a detailed account of the passion,⁸²² because Ælfric deliberately does not give homilies for the first two days of the *Triduum*, and Palm Sunday, the other occasion on which a gospel of the Passion would be read, is instead used to expound Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday typically has two gospel

⁸²¹ Godden, *Introduction*. The commentary for each homily lists its sources and those used by Ælfric's main influences, such as Paul the Deacon and Haymo, and the texts in the church lectionary.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

readings, with Christ's entry into Jerusalem being read as part of the procession into the church, for which Ælfric in his *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, aiming to provide the monks with liturgical instructions, prescribed John 12.9-13, but the homiliaries of Paul the Deacon and Haymo use Matthew 21.1-9, and the *Old English Gospels* use Luke's account, Luke 19.28-40.⁸²³ The main gospel text would be a synoptic account of the passion, with John's account being kept for Good Friday.

The homily on the feast-day of a confessor, II.38, conflates Matthew 25.14-30 with Luke 19.12-26. This is the parable of the talents, which Ælfric applies to the responsibility of teachers. The feast days of the saints often, and appropriately, focus on stories from the saint's life, rather than the appointed scripture passage. For example, in the sermon for St James the Apostle and the Seven Sleepers, Ælfric discusses the death of James as in Acts 12.1-2, but this text is very brief, with his actual death barely mentioned, so Ælfric focuses instead on his conflict with a magician and the Jews, and their conversion due to his miracle working and proving of Christ's divinity. It also discusses the gospel Matthew 20.20-23, in which the mother of James and John ask Christ whether they will sit by his side in Heaven. This focus on James' teaching makes the homily less sensationalist than it might otherwise have been, and draws it back to the person of Christ, who is, after all, the reason for which James is sanctified. These differences show that Ælfric did not blindly follow his sources in 'translation' as he himself suggests, but was prepared to go his own way in order to provide what he saw as the most appropriate preaching material. Many of his decisions bring the focus back to Christ, whether in comparison or as the primary referent, and draw the individual homilies into the greater cycle, rather than leaving them as stand-alone works without wider significance.

Major topics

Ælfric focused on right belief,⁸²⁴ both for himself and his audience. His aim was to understand God, and, through God, the world.⁸²⁵ His immediate object was 'God's rule as revealed by salvation history', and Lees argues that he 'embeds history and hagiography in the story of salvation'.⁸²⁶ Indeed, he appears to be more interested in the past than present circumstances: Hurt pointed out that Ælfric 'seldom mentions contemporary events, but such themes as the righteousness of a "just war" of self-defense, the qualities of the Christian king,

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

⁸²⁴ Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 336.

⁸²⁵ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 47.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

and the strength that God lends his people in their time of need recur again and again in his work'.⁸²⁷ Morally, however, his thoughts were very much in the present. Kleist has argued that 'Ælfric's view of the bleak peril of the times, the people's need, and his responsibility as their teacher comes through from the first pages of his early work at Cerne'.⁸²⁸

Ælfric was a man of the church and spent a good deal of time contemplating its rituals and traditions. He had a moderate approach to penance and the removal of vice.⁸²⁹ Ælfric showed interest in other sacraments too, particularly baptism and the Eucharist. He was also interested in the seasons of the church, both those of penance and those for festive occasions. His interests are different from those of the anonymous homilists, who Upchurch argues were less interested in the reasons for, rather than the details of, the rituals of Lent.⁸³⁰ His interpretations stress doctrine as much as practice and make 'significant intellectual demands' on his lay audience, focusing on the story of the temptation in the desert as evidence of God's sovereignty over the devil, with the conflict between Christ and Satan shown as part of a divine plan, in that the devil was permitted to approach Christ, rather than doing so through his own power.⁸³¹ Ælfric links this to free will, with the devil's testing designed to perfect Christians, and with God and Christ's power over the devil indicative of ours over sin.⁸³² As Christ was pure in his mind, the devil's assaults on him were only external.⁸³³

Considering that the themes of the homilies are focused on liturgical readings and saints' days, it is unsurprising that the central figure of Ælfric's homilies is Christ: the Cornerstone of the New Testament; the one whom the prophets of the Old Testament predicted; and the inspiration for sanctity. Christ is the pivot of the church and its liturgical calendar, and the saints are regarded as holy because of their special relationship with him. Ælfric's homilies focus at length and in depth on the person and actions of Christ, encompassing his relationship with God the Father, the Holy Spirit, the members of the church and the ancient elect, and his role in salvation history. Butcher says that the *Catholic Homilies* 'provide a solid foundation for the Christocentric educational plan he worked on during his monastic life. Here for the first time in the vernacular Ælfric explains Christianity's major doctrines, provides his audience commentary on them, and highlights

⁸²⁷ Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 136.

⁸²⁸ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, p. 167.

⁸²⁹ Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 336.

⁸³⁰ Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homilies', p. 228.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸³³ Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, p. 61.

Christ's crucial sacrifice as the sole way to salvation'.⁸³⁴ This 'Christocentric' plan suggests that Ælfric attempted to do so particularly focusing on Christ, and, with such a comprehensive coverage of the church's year, presumably focusing on most aspects of how he was understood by the Anglo-Saxon Church. I intend to explore the methods Ælfric uses to depict Christ, what aspects of Christ's role and person come through most strongly throughout Ælfric's homiletic writing, and why this might be. The Christology of Ælfric's homilies has not yet been examined and I believe this will shed further light on the doctrine he was trying to impart to his congregations.

Theology

Ælfric's theology has been examined comprehensively and to a very high standard by Lynne Grundy.⁸³⁵ She emphasises the fact that the ideas Ælfric inherits are from Augustine, but that he both develops and disseminates them.⁸³⁶ She particularly notes his extensive interest in the Trinity, a point that is also picked up by Barbara Raw.⁸³⁷ How theologically complex Ælfric intended his homilies to be is questionable: Godden says he 'thought of himself as offering elementary instruction to the simple and ignorant laity'.⁸³⁸ Yet, Gatch also describes him as the most important theologian of the late Anglo-Saxon church.⁸³⁹ Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* are intended for the people, and therefore contain the chief doctrines which he believes should be known by all.⁸⁴⁰ Godden argues that Ælfric's 'comments and extrapolations' do, nonetheless, focus more on ethics and morality than on church dogma.⁸⁴¹ Because of his Trinitarian interests, Ælfric's theology cannot but help to overlap a great deal with his Christology, which Grundy also discusses at length.

Ælfric's Christ

Ælfric, in his *Colloquy*, wrote descriptions of the characteristics and requirements of men in a variety of professions. He was interested in the role that all sorts of people had to play in Anglo-Saxon society, and it is not surprising that this extends to his interest in the role of

⁸³⁴ Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 5.

⁸³⁵ Grundy, *Books and Grace*.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸³⁷ Raw, *Trinity*, p. 1.

⁸³⁸ Godden, 'Ælfric and the Vernacular Tradition', p. 106.

⁸³⁹ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 12.

⁸⁴⁰ Halvorson, *Doctrinal Terms*, p. 5.

⁸⁴¹ Godden, 'Problem of Miracles', p. 303.

Christ. As the most deliberate of the Anglo-Saxon homilists, Ælfric is able to be widely comprehensive, exploring the nature of Christ through the readings of the entire church year, as well as from the perspective of hagiography. Because of his devotion to patristic authors, and his organised framework, Ælfric's Christology is the most systematic, and shows the least deviation from the orthodox traditions of the Church. However, due to his wide range of texts, he is also able to present the most varied range of images of Christ, however established they may be. Ælfric says himself: '[g]if we willað areccan ealle ða gewitnyssa þe be Criste awritene sind, þonne gæð þær swiðe micel hwil to; ne þeahhwæðere we ne magon hi ealle gereccan'.⁸⁴² Ælfric's homiletic writing stands in high contrast to that of the anonymous Anglo-Saxon homilists, and while his images of Christ may be less colourful, Christ permeates his work in an absolute way, as he fulfils his role as Redeemer and Saviour, revealing his tasks and setting out to complete them.

Grundy has succinctly analysed Ælfric's Christology in her monograph on Ælfric's theology:

Ælfric's Christology, like Augustine's, asserts the perfect union of God and man in Christ. Because of this union he insists on the elevation of humanity to the Godhead by the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, and thus centres his attention on the redemptive life and death of the Son. Reproducing the Augustinian formula he declares that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and that as he is the personal love expressed between them, uniting them, so also he unites the believer with God in love.

Ælfric seeks to introduce the Christian to a relationship with God as Trinity, looking to God the Father and exploring the implications of sonship; recognizing the Son as brother and Lord; enjoying the indwelling love of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴³

Grundy's summary is accurate, and while she discusses these ideas further within her work on Ælfric's theology, it is also worth developing them out of this context.

Ælfric's names for Christ

Because Ælfric's writing is so widely spread over the books of the bible, he is able to use a great deal of the imagery available to represent God and Christ. As Pearce puts it, 'Ælfric

⁸⁴² Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, p. 9; Thorpe, *Homilies*, pp. 18-19, 'If we will recount all the testimonies that are written concerning Christ, a very great time will be passed therein; yet can we not reckon them all'.

⁸⁴³ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 14.

covers a good deal of territory, both in literal and theological terms. The names he draws upon are made to serve his homiletic themes'.⁸⁴⁴ I have examined the *Catholic Homilies* in order to see just how Ælfric did this. I gathered nearly six thousand attestations of over two hundred discrete terms, with some names appearing in single attestations, and others occurring with very high frequency. For example, *God* occurs by itself nearly two thousand times, whereas *Ælmihtig Alysend* only occurs once, though *Ælmihtig* and *Alysend* are more common separately. Some terms occur only when they are relevant to the imagery of a particular text. Halvorson has said that '[i]n presenting Christian doctrine Ælfric begins with the assumption of God, and then, by presenting the chief divine attributes, shows what manner of God He is assumed to be'.⁸⁴⁵ this is also the case with his presentation of Christ, and below I focus on a few of Christ's most significant names.

The most common term for Christ is the direct translation, *Crist*. This mostly acts as a functional term, rather than having anything to do with being anointed or the Messiah. There are about eleven more attestations of variations on the base term, primarily indicating that he is 'true Christ'.

Whereas the Vulgate Bible mostly uses *Iesus* to name Christ, for Ælfric and his audience Christ is most often *Hælend*, 'Saviour' or more literally 'Healer'.⁸⁴⁶ *Iesus* also means 'Saviour', but the Old English rendering of *Hælend* is not a direct match, and has wider connotations. Throughout the *Catholic Homilies* there are over three hundred and fifty attestations for *Hælend* and only twenty-five for *Iesus*, showing a great disparity, despite the possibility of either term being used. This use of a title, rather than a proper name, places Christ at the centre of salvation history: in order for somebody to be healed, there must first be an injury. The liturgy of the Church, whilst focused around the person of Christ, his life on earth and his message, nonetheless encompasses the scriptures reaching back to the beginning of salvation history, that is, the Creation of the world and everything in it, and shortly after the Fall of Adam and Eve. It is the damage caused by this fall that Christ came to heal.

Hill has noted that in homily I.38 there is a striking use of *Christus Medicus* imagery as an interpretation of *Hælend*, which she believes is the clearest example of Ælfric's awareness of the value of etymologies.⁸⁴⁷ She also notes that in Pope 2 there is interplay

⁸⁴⁴ Pearce, 'Name Patterns', p. 150.

⁸⁴⁵ Halvorson, *Doctrinal Terms*, p. 10.

⁸⁴⁶ Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 40.

⁸⁴⁷ Hill, 'Ælfric's Use of Etymologies', p. 314.

between *Salvator* for Christ, and a range of sickness and healing vocabulary.⁸⁴⁸ Hill argues that Ælfric deliberately uses *hælan* with *Hælend* to emphasise his point. He extends its usage beyond its scriptural basis, replacing the biblical *Iesus* and *Dominus* at the pool in Bethesda in John 5.⁸⁴⁹ Though the idea of Christ as healer of sins is common throughout Christian tradition, among the Old English homilies it is only by Ælfric that it is thus emphasised.⁸⁵⁰

Also common in the Vulgate is *Dominus*. This carries over to Ælfric's homilies, though, as in the Bible, *Drihten* or 'Lord' often refers to the God of the Old Testament, not only to Christ. There are approximately four hundred and sixty attestations of *Drihten*, but only thirty-two of *Hlaford*, also meaning 'Lord', but often translated by Thorpe as 'Master' or 'Teacher'. This term seems to designate Christ more specifically. *Drihten* sometimes occurs as a collocation, combined either with *God*, *Crist*, or *Hælend*, and often with descriptors indicating strength.

Whilst *Sunu* by itself occurs relatively seldom, this is perhaps because there is more variety in the way this aspect of the Trinity is described. *Godes Sunu* and *Ælmihtig Godes Sunu* occur with moderate frequency, and he is also described as *Bearn* and *Godes Bearn*. Both *Sunu* and *Bearn* are also used to describe Christ as 'Son of Man', indicating Christ's humanity as well as his divinity.

Alysend or 'Redeemer' is seldom used as a term for Christ, and is far eclipsed by the usage of *Hælend*. Nonetheless, this is still one of the key roles of Christ in Ælfric's homilies, which frequently reiterate that Christ was sent for the redemption of humankind. The boundaries between 'salvation' and 'redemption' are blurred, but there is considerable evidence to indicate that Christ's role as Redeemer was a very significant one, as I discuss further in this chapter.

Christ's role in Salvation History

Lees has argued that salvation history, being the Creation, Fall, and Redemption, structures Ælfric's writing,⁸⁵¹ which corresponds with my own findings, though I would note

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸⁵¹ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 62.

also the completion of this chronology with Judgement. This focus is perhaps to be expected, as Lees also says that '[s]alvation history is a given of homiletic writing; fortified by the reiteration of conventions, it is a foundational belief whose premises are infinitely adaptable'.⁸⁵² While this may be the case, the way in which Ælfric approaches salvation history is distinctive from that of his anonymous predecessors, mostly because it focuses on the *whole* story of salvation, rather than particularly emphasising Judgement and looking backwards from there. The stage he is most interested in is Redemption. Gatch claims that Ælfric intended in his homilies to cover all the chief points of universal history, with Christ's redemption at the centre.⁸⁵³ This section presents a basic overview of salvation history and Christology as preached in Ælfric's homilies, particularly focusing on Christ's role as Redeemer, and what this should mean for the audience of his homilies.

Salvation history, the usual term for the story of God's relationship with his people, can be laid out in some sort of a timeline, with a perspective that looks both backwards and forwards. The bible has been arranged to reflect this, though historical books are interspersed with books of laws, wisdom, and poetry. Creation is followed by the histories of the patriarchs and King David, and then the prophets, who tell of visions, and warn the people to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah, keeping the focus on the imminent future. Following the incarnation of Christ and the redemptive act is the Christian age, which looks back to the teachings of the prophets and Christ, and bears in mind the expected end of the world and the Judgement that would follow.

Salvation history can be seen to have a special place in the Anglo-Saxon *psyche*, with its motifs of exile and transcendence resonating with Old English heroic literature.⁸⁵⁴ However, the salvation story definitely brings something new to this setting: Lees has said that 'In place of Germanic myth, Christianity offers a comprehensive, coherent, and ordered narrative, which structures the history of the individual and the communal by means of the drama of original sin and its transcendence'.⁸⁵⁵ Ælfric does not believe that anything happens by destiny, but 'by the doom of God'.⁸⁵⁶ In terms of Ælfric's own approach, Lees argues that

Ælfric's belief... generates a conscious aesthetic of salvation ... Belief in salvation takes the form of a body of knowledge and a history, one of the purposes of which is

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁵³ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 12-3.

⁸⁵⁴ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 52.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁸⁵⁶ Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 396.

to distinguish the true from the false... Belief is not just a mental category, an inner conviction, or a matter of experience, but a specific knowledge, formulated as the attainment of wisdom, which can be transmitted and which forms the basis for other knowledge.⁸⁵⁷

Salvation history is the foundation upon which all of Ælfric's teaching is built, and his genuine concern to promote right belief in his audience can be felt throughout his homilies, especially in his repetition of key doctrines, such as the relationship between the members of the Trinity, and Christ's dual natures. Ælfric makes the most of a homily on the Annunciation, I.13, to talk about Christ's place in the course of salvation history: Christ coming at the Annunciation, in order to redeem mankind, was always God's plan. Homily II.1, for Christmas, highlights God's intentions from the Fall to help mankind by sending Christ. While his teaching is doctrinal, as mentioned earlier, everything has implications for the moral behaviour which Ælfric extolls,⁸⁵⁸ more from a perspective of showing gratitude for God's plan, and thus, through grace, earning the reward which has already been paid for by Christ's sacrifice, rather than for fear of not deserving it.

Creation, and Christ's two natures

Ælfric emphasises time and again throughout his homilies that Christ is co-eternal with God, and of the same nature. This is particularly highlighted in his accounts of Creation: always, Creation happens through Christ himself, rather than simply God. Specifically, the agent of Creation is the Word of God, which prefigures his work in the re-Creation.⁸⁵⁹ The continuity of Christ is also highlighted, for example in II.1: he is the means of Creation, then later sent into the world for our spiritual re-Creation by redemption. Ælfric is aware of the complexity of this idea, and so one of his major focuses is on describing how Christ could both be at Creation, before time, and born into the temporal world in the time of the Emperor Augustus.

From the earliest days of the Church, the question of Christ's nature was a hotly contested issue. Having claimed to have come for Gentiles as well as Jews, he took on a role of great significance in very different societies. The monotheist Jews could only have one God, but the Greek Christians came from a tradition which could encompass many cults and worship far less exclusively. Jesus was a human and the Jewish Messiah, but for many he was

⁸⁵⁷ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. xi.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁸⁵⁹ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 25.

divine, and understood both as God himself and as God's Son.⁸⁶⁰ It took centuries of debate for the Christian creeds to be developed, and theological disagreements did not stop with them.

Ælfric uses a number of methods to explain Christ's dual natures. Homily II.1 first makes it clear that the two natures were never mingled. In homily II.1, Ælfric describes Christ as twice born: once as God, and once as man. He does quickly reiterate the fact that Christ was not actually born as God, but always existed. Homily I.20 describes the Father and Son as inseparable, like, for example, a flame emitting light: the light proceeds from the flame, but the flame is never without it. This homily highlights his equality with God, with neither greater than the other. The dual natures are a key part of Ælfric's doctrine of redemption: homily I.11, on the temptation of Christ, explains that Christ hid his divinity in his humanity, which is why the devil dared to tempt him. Had he known Christ was God, he would not have done so. When Christ died, it was only in his human nature, not in his divinity, which proceeded to Hell, though homily II.2 says that Christ rose and ascended in his flesh, not just in his divinity. Pope 5 explains that Christ's human nature became weary, by which it gave strength to everybody else. Ælfric states at the outset in homily I.1 that Christ did not perform any miracles until after he had chosen his disciples. Their purpose was to show that he was God's Son. Godden believes miracles were fundamental to Ælfric's literary work,⁸⁶¹ as indeed all that Christ does in the gospels is for the purpose of revelation.

Redemption

Turner believes the early church fathers provided no satisfactory treatment of redemption,⁸⁶² but Pelteret has pointed out that the importance of redemption to the Anglo-Saxons is exemplified in the many words available for the subject, particularly for the poetic context,⁸⁶³ revealing an unprecedented interest in the concept. The Latin term *redimere*, literally 'to buy back' is translated in the Anglo-Saxon *alysan*, or 'to loosen'. Whilst the etymology of each term is discrete, it is easy to understand how both might be used in the same context, regarding slavery. To buy somebody would lead to their freedom, or loosening, from a master, even if presumably this might mean being in thrall to a new master.

⁸⁶⁰ See further O'Collins, *Christology* and Moule, *Origin of Christology*.

⁸⁶¹ Godden, 'Problem of Miracles', p. 288.

⁸⁶² Turner, *Patristic Doctrine*, p. 11.

⁸⁶³ Pelteret, *Slavery*, p. 47.

In homily II.1 *For the Nativity of the Lord*, Ælfric declares that the Father created us through the Son, and later sent the same Son to this life for our redemption, because Adam broke the commandment and obeyed the devil's teaching, and all mankind was delivered to the devil. This gives Christ a key role long before his incarnation in the New Testament. It was commonly understood that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve forfeited their right to freedom by striving to be more than they had been created to be, and by succumbing to the temptation of the devil, or sin. Like the devil they fell, but in I.1, his first Catholic homily, about Creation, Ælfric explains that God knew Adam had been seduced, and so contemplated how to be merciful to him and mankind. Nonetheless, the general understanding was that humanity was now bound in slavery to the devil. Although it is presumed that God would have been able to overthrow the devil by force, had he wanted to, God's sense of justice meant that this was not fair, as the devil had a 'right' to humanity, because of their fall into sin, through exercising their free will. He sent his only Son to his death, as a price for the redemption of mankind.⁸⁶⁴ As Satan did not know who he was dealing with, the incarnation was considered as a trick by early medieval theologians.⁸⁶⁵ This is why Satan tried to find out who Jesus was on numerous occasions. Marx suggests that God's trick is justified because of the deception of humankind at the Fall. This trick enabled him to free all humanity from the power of the devil.⁸⁶⁶ As Ælfric explains in the homily I.20 *On the Catholic Faith*, because Christ was guiltless, Satan, in instigating the Jews to kill Jesus, forfeited his rights to humanity and was bound up in Hell. The supplementary sermon *For Pentecost Sunday*, Pope 10, continues the story, telling of the Harrowing of Hell: '[s]e deofol þa forleas þæt he gelæht hæfde to his anwealde æror of Adames cynne, eall þæt on God gelyfde, and hi alysde Crist, se ðe butan synnum unscyldig þrowode, and he sigefæst swa siðode heonon mid þam herereafe þe he on helle gefette, ealle his gecorenan of Adames cynne.'⁸⁶⁷

The great story of redemption in the Old Testament is, of course, the tale of God delivering the Hebrews from slavery and leading them for forty years in the wilderness, prefiguring Jesus' forty days in the desert, the forty days of Lent in the Christian calendar, and even the time of suffering in purgatory between dying and reaching the 'Promised Land', or Heaven. Ælfric deals with this topic in his sermon *About the People of Israel* (Pope 20),

⁸⁶⁴ Marx, *Devil's Rights*, p. 10.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸⁶⁷ Pope *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 404, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 100, 'The devil lost all those of Adam's kin who believed in God. Although Satan had previously subjected them to his authority, Christ – the One who suffered guiltlessly and without sins – set them free and, victorious, journeyed away from Hell with the spoil he had gotten there, all his chosen of Adam's family.'

retelling part of the book of Exodus. This homily has no known Latin precedent,⁸⁶⁸ so it is seemingly Ælfric's own voice dealing with a topic that he felt was especially pertinent to his audience. God set the Israelites free from slavery, but as Ælfric makes apparent in this homily, they were not very grateful, and spent a great deal of time complaining, and even wishing to go back to the relative comfort of Egypt despite their captivity, which can be seen as a desire to return to sin. This message is analogous to people continuing in sin after Christ has redeemed them. This is also portrayed in I.7, where Ælfric, recounting the description of the star over Bethlehem, says that Christ redeems people from their guilt, and they can either obey his commands or by their own choice forsake God, who will in turn abandon them to eternal torment. Kleist argues that the order of these events is significant, with God's withdrawal of grace following the people's rejection of him, as evidence of Ælfric's view about human free will.⁸⁶⁹

Ælfric states in his homily for *The Annunciation of Saint Mary* that from the beginning of mankind God made known by signs and prophecies that he would redeem humanity through him by whom he made all creation: his Son. This was God's covenant. Through typology, Ælfric draws together the Fall and Redemption. II.13, the homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, declares that death came to us through a tree, the tree in the Garden of Eden, and a tree later brought life and redemption, by means of the cross. Ælfric draws together the figures of Mary and Eve, preaching in I.13, the Annunciation of Saint Mary, that a fitting beginning of human redemption was that the angel was sent from God to the virgin, to announce the birth of God through her, since 'Us becom ða deað 7 forwyrd þurh wif, 7 us becom eft lif 7 hredding þurh wimman'.⁸⁷⁰ In homily II.1 *On the birth of the Lord*, Ælfric says that Eve shut the gate to Heaven, and Mary has opened it again, so long as we do not shut it against ourselves by evil works. Mary's son, Christ, brought knowledge and illumination with his redemptive work,⁸⁷¹ and she is the instrument through which the redemption is brought about.

The Passion is the highly concentrated focal point of the story of Christ the Redeemer. Christ's death was portrayed as the redemption of humankind from the Devil's imprisonment.

⁸⁶⁸ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, II, p. 639.

⁸⁶⁹ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, p. 183.

⁸⁷⁰ Clemons, *Catholic Homilies I*, p. 283; Thorpe, *Homilies*, I, pp. 194-5, 'Death and perdition befell us through a woman, and afterwards life and salvation came to us through a woman'.

⁸⁷¹ Turner, *Patristic Doctrine*, p. 45.

Sin was described as captivity to the devil, with Christ's death freeing us from this.⁸⁷² Pope 11, on the Octave of Pentecost, summarises the events: 'he wæs gefæstnod for urum synnum on rode on Langgan Frigedæge mid feower næglum, and gewunod mid spere syððan he gewit[e]n wæs, and hu he wæs bebyrged on þam ylcan dæge, and us swa alysde mid his agenum deaðe'.⁸⁷³ This obedience to God the Father is crucial to redemption. Pope 10, the homily for Pentecost Sunday says '[o]n þam we magon tocnawan þæt Crist lufode his Fæder, on þam þe he wæs gehyrsum his Fæder oþ deað, and be his bebode he us swa alysde, sylfwilles swaðeah'.⁸⁷⁴ The first series homily for Easter Sunday, I.15, affirms that it is a greater miracle that Christ arose from the sepulchre than if he had come down from the cross: he broke death into pieces rather than preserving his own life. The fact that God takes on humanity and allows himself to be killed is the greatest wonder.

The Resurrection is essential for Christ's redeeming act to be a success, as it is in coming back from the dead that his divinity and power over the devil is shown. The sermon *For the Sixth Day in the Fourth Week of Lent* makes this relevant to Ælfric's congregation: 'Is swaþeah oðer ærist on urum sawlum þe ure Hælend deð dæghwamlice on mannum, þonne seo sawul arist of ðære synna deaðe, for þam se ðe syngað, hys sawul ne leofað, buton heo þurh andetnysse eft acucige, and þurh dædbote hyre Drihten gladige. Ælc man ondræd him deaðes tocyme, and feawa him ondrædað þære sawle deað'.⁸⁷⁵ This clearly instructs people that they need to be penitent in order to partake of the resurrection, and warns them of consequences if they are not.

The way Ælfric describes Christ as Redeemer is very significant in the context of his homilies. Whilst the people's sin and culpability is acknowledged, the focus is on the restoration that Christ brings, and on looking to the future. Ælfric is exhorting his congregation to have hope and to do what it can to deserve this redemption, rather than to despair. The message of redemption is a practical one and one that should have been able to inspire his listeners and readers to respond positively.

⁸⁷² Pelteret, *Slavery*, p. 69.

⁸⁷³ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 417, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 102, 'Christ was fastened on the cross with four nails on Good Friday and was wounded with a spear after departing from this life and was buried that same day, and that is how he redeemed us with his own death'.

⁸⁷⁴ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 405, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 100, 'We know Christ loved his Father because he was obedient to him unto death. And by obeying his Father's command, his Son set us free, though entirely voluntarily'.

⁸⁷⁵ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 318, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 72, 'Our Saviour also daily accomplishes in our souls a second resurrection, which is when the soul rises up out of the death of sins because the soul of the person who sins cannot live unless it is revived again through confession and unless it pleases its Lord through penance. Every person dreads dying, and yet few dread the death of the soul'.

Judgement

Ælfric discusses Judgement with some frequency, but his take on it, in the *Catholic Homilies* at least, is relatively mild and unsensational. In Ælfric's opinion, because Christ lived two kinds of life, the human and divine, death was not fearful to those who were faithful to him in their earthly life; rather, it was salutary, to be met with joy.⁸⁷⁶ Ælfric did not write an extended *Descensus ad Infernum* nor any lengthy treatment of the Last Times,⁸⁷⁷ though Gatch argues that these concepts are foundational for his treatment of Christ.⁸⁷⁸ Ælfric speaks of his own age as the last time,⁸⁷⁹ though how precisely he was measuring this is hard to say, particularly as he also reiterated that one could not know when the end of time would be. His account of Judgement usually follows the synoptic apocalypse and exegetical tradition.⁸⁸⁰ Though the Blickling homilist also worked according to the liturgical calendar, he and Ælfric use eschatological materials at different times: Ælfric used them for Epiphany, the Octave of Pentecost, and Advent.⁸⁸¹ He is more restrained than the anonymous homilists, especially regarding apocryphal detail. However, he does add or change details when it suits.⁸⁸²

In the Judgement scenes, Christ is depicted at the right hand of the Father, mild to the righteous and awful to sinners. As Judge, he knows all and requires no witness. It is too late to repent at Doomsday, for Christ will divide men, calling the elect and dismissing the condemned, before he ascends alone as at the Resurrection.⁸⁸³ Thus, Gatch says that '[i]n Ælfric's tradition, therefore, the topic of the Last Times and the apocalypse has to do with Christ's work of salvation.'⁸⁸⁴ In his homily I.22 on Pentecost, Ælfric affirms that Jesus came to save, not judge. However, his gentle direction would be followed by Judgement. Emphasis is placed on encouraging people to be good. Ælfric declares in his homily *On the day of Judgement*, Pope 18, that Christ will come with his angels to judge us 'ælcum be hys geearnungum',⁸⁸⁵ and will give eternal joy to those who obey him and do good works, whereas those who neglect him and do evil deeds will go to Hell. The sermon continues that on Doomsday the fire will come suddenly, and nobody will escape. It will purify the earth, which will not be burnt up, but cleansed. The sermon II.40, *For the dedication of a church*,

⁸⁷⁶ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 67.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 68 and 77.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸⁷⁹ Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 347.

⁸⁸⁰ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 82.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸⁸² Bedingfield, 'Anglo-Saxons on Fire', pp. 675-6.

⁸⁸³ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 82.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸⁸⁵ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, II, p. 592, 'each by his merits'.

insists that those who have good works will suffer no torment in the fire. Light sins will be purged, but these people will come to God's kingdom. Deadly sins, however, will result in everlasting fire, with no hope of redemption. The Judgement scenes are less Christological than most of Ælfric's writing, because here he particularly focuses on encouraging his audience to refrain from sin.

Practical Applications

Ælfric expects his audience to respond to his preaching according to what he has been teaching them. The most essential ingredient for redemption, according to Ælfric, is faith. In II.26, *On the ninth Sunday after Pentecost*, he says 'Ðis is þæt fyrmeste weorc and se fyrmesta willa, þæt we gelyfon on ðone ancennedan Godes Sunu, Hælend Crist, þone ðe se Ælmihtiga Fæder for ure alysednysse asende'.⁸⁸⁶ It is not entirely necessary for the faith to be your own. The second series Epiphany homily, II.3, insists that children can be saved through the faith of others, namely godparents, just as they are condemned through the sins of others in original sin, and Pope 19, *About apostolic doctrine*, recalls that an unbelieving man will be sanctified by a believing wife, and vice versa.

Ælfric shows that not to have faith is the worst possible thing. He suggests that the Jews are worse than the devils, who at least believe in Christ and fear him. The lack of faith on the part of the Jews is another of his most common themes, particular in comparison to the rest of creation all acknowledging the Creator, as in homily I.7. Faith must be kept, even at the cost of life. Pride, and fear, can get in the way: in Pope 19, a dying thane refuses to confess his sins for fear of being thought a coward in the face of death.⁸⁸⁷ Angels come to his deathbed with a little book of his good deeds, but devils come to claim him with a far bigger book of his sins, and the angels let him be taken. His pride keeps him from any chance of redemption.

The other key aspect of Ælfric's doctrine of Christ as Redeemer is that one must merit this redemption. The importance of Bede's influence can be seen in Ælfric's interest in merit, which Kleist believes has 'disproportionate' emphasis in Bede's work. However, Ælfric often adds merit, dependent on God's grace, to the sources he uses, though this emphasis on merit

⁸⁸⁶ Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, p. 240; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, pp. 412-3, 'This is the first work and the first will, that we believe in the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom the Almighty Father sent for our redemption'.

⁸⁸⁷ Ælfric takes this story from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.xii.

does decrease in his later writing.⁸⁸⁸ Many of the Lenten homilies dwell on merit, such as II.8, for the Second Sunday in Lent, which advocates confessions, fastings, watchings, prayers, and alms-deeds, all of which wash from sin, and enable the person to celebrate Easter fully. Upchurch says that '[b]ecause Christians must labour, journey, seek sustenance and fight in order to earn God's grace, Ælfric's doctrine of merit and reward calls attention to the momentous conditionality of their salvation, and explains why human agency, free will and good works feature prominently in his teaching for Lent'.⁸⁸⁹ Deathbed confessions are not the ideal situation. The responsibility for earning salvation is our own, and Ælfric insists we should not curse Adam and Eve for their sin, but merit God's mercy and obey his commandments, putting the impetus on the individual. Although salvation is made available for all by Christ, some degree of acceptance and effort must be reciprocated. Ælfric believes it is essential not to despair of meriting the friendship of God because of our sins, so long as one does good – after all, Christ gave his life for sinners.

As in all of Western Christendom, sacraments were an integral part of the Anglo-Saxon church. They were an outward sign of an inward grace, as Ælfric's writing makes clear. An essential element of receiving redemption was through baptism. This would remove all sin up to that point, especially original sin. Without baptism, even someone innocent or believing in Christ could not be saved, as is exemplified in II.34 (II.39 for Thorpe) *St Martin*, where Martin has to bring a believing catechumen back to life in order to be baptised. Pope I, for the First Sunday after Pentecost, urges not to delay baptism, as heathen children go to Hell. In Pope 4, for the Third Sunday in Lent, Ælfric explains that the devil is driven out from a heathen when he is baptised, through the Lord's power. However, Ælfric also says that everyone is to be baptised only once, for repentance and penance and cessation from evil will wash us from post-baptismal sins, which is the sacrament of reconciliation.

The other sacrament that Ælfric particularly discusses in terms of redemption is the Eucharist. The Easter homily II.15 gives an explanation of communion, with the story of the Passover, slaughtering the lamb at night, offering it to God, and smearing its blood on the lintel. 'Israel, the people of God, was delivered from that sudden death through the offering of the lamb, and the marking with its blood'. Similarly, the Eucharist, with Christ as the sacrificial lamb, delivers Christians. In the *Palm Sunday* sermon Ælfric preaches that the bread is his body, hallowed for the redemption of humanity. The wine is the blood of the

⁸⁸⁸ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, pp. 199-200, 203.

⁸⁸⁹ Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homilies', p. 246.

New Testament, shed for men for the forgiveness of sins. The eucharist feeds and nourishes people spiritually while they are trying to live Christian lives on earth, in hope of redemption, although it does still seem to be a notch down in importance compared to baptism. Ælfric repeatedly discussed the nature of the Eucharist, with Christ typically, but not literally, represented in the bread,⁸⁹⁰ a point of view that was later used in the formation of the doctrine of the Church of England.

As discussed earlier, Ælfric also advocates penance, not yet a formal sacrament of the church but omnipresent in Anglo-Saxon homiletic writing.⁸⁹¹ This is both in penitential thoughts and deeds. In homily XXVIII, for the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Ælfric warns that we should not proclaim our good deeds but implore mercy for our misdeeds. Ælfric explains that the Holy Spirit has mercy on penitent people, not those who despise his grace. However, he also suggests that the man who frequently sins and frequently atones angers God. By helping to save others, you can do much good for yourself. The Monday homily II.21 *For the Great Litany* says that if any man should turn another from error, he redeems his own soul from death, and blots out many sins by the correction of the heretic. This recalls Ælfric's own purpose in composing the Catholic Homilies, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. His homilies show the influence of the Carolingian dual system of repentance, mentioning both the public and private rituals.⁸⁹² His three forms of reconciliation were confession to God for minor sins, confession to the priest for major and minor sins, and public penance for sins of public consequence, emphasising the role of the bishop.⁸⁹³

Christological typology in Ælfric's homilies: some examples

Christ's identity and role, while primarily discussed in the New Testament and in homilies about New Testament texts, is also discussed by Ælfric while examining texts from the Old Testament. Ælfric shows a great passion for typology, both inherited from his sources and at times unique to him. This section looks at some of Ælfric's use of typology, and what this can signal about Christ as he presents him.

⁸⁹⁰ Godfrey, *Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 339.

⁸⁹¹ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 149.

⁸⁹² Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, pp. 141 and 157.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

The Old Testament encompasses a number of covenants, made between God and the Hebrews at significant points in their history, which highlight their special relationship. This is closely tied up with the Law. Christ's advent, and his death and resurrection, signal a New Covenant, made available for all people, with Christ's shed blood the seal as suggested at Luke 22.20. The New Covenant is made possible by the mediation of the humanity of Christ, whose redemptive work is effectively a creation of the community of God, a second work of Creation.⁸⁹⁴ It is seen by some, including Ælfric at II.12, as the fulfilment of the Old Law. While the New Covenant surpasses the earlier, it does not make it irrelevant. For religious instructors like Ælfric, being able to link the past covenant with the present is of great importance.

The synoptic gospels focus on Christ's humanity, and his role as the fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew begins by linking the past with the present, with the genealogy of Jesus, reaching back to Abraham, before recounting the nativity. Mark connects more recent prophecies with the coming of Christ, starting by linking the words of John the Baptist with the prophet Isaiah, and then telling of the adult baptism of Christ. The gospel of Luke begins with the nativity of John the Baptist, and his father's prophecy linking Christ's coming with the promise made to Abraham, the Annunciation, and Christ's nativity. John's gospel, as the one most focused on Christ's divinity, is the most significant here. It reaches right back to the beginning of Creation. Its first verses are: 'In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum. Hoc erat in principio apud Deum. Omnia per ipsum facta sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est', and a few verses later on: 'Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis et vidimus gloriam eius gloriam quasi unigeniti a Patre plenum gratiae et veritatis'.⁸⁹⁵ It then moves to the prophecies of John the Baptist and the adult ministry of Christ.

What I would like to focus on is this complex issue expressed by John. Ælfric says in the additional *Sermon for the Nativity of the Lord*, covering this text, '7 þæt anginn is his ancenneda Sunu, þurh þone he gesceop ealle gesceafta 7 hi ealle geliffæste þurh þone lyfiendan Gast', and 'nis þæt halige Word awend to flæsce, ac se heofonlica Æþeling her on

⁸⁹⁴ Grundy, *Books and Grace*, p. 25.

⁸⁹⁵ John 1.1-3, 14. In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made.... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

þas woruld com 7 þa menniscnysse genam of Marian innoðe'.⁸⁹⁶ Whilst the gospels tell of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, there is a bigger picture. The Word, God's Son, was at the beginning of Creation. As Ælfric's eschatological sermon, delivered on the Octave of Pentecost, reminds us, Christ will also be there at the end of the world and the last Judgement.

So how might a homilist, such as Ælfric, deal with such a complex notion of time? While Christmas is hugely significant in salvation history, as the point at which Christ entered the world as a man in order to redeem people from their sins, the story of God the Son cannot be seen in such a linear manner as the story of humanity. I will try to briefly shed some light on Ælfric's typology.

A type, according to Definition 1.a in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is 'That by which something is symbolized or figured; anything having a symbolical signification; a symbol, emblem; specifically in Theology a person, object, or event of Old Testament history, prefiguring some person or thing revealed in the new dispensation; correlative to antitype in (the) type, in symbolic representation.' Typology, therefore, is 'The study of symbolic representation, especially of the origin and meaning of Scripture types; also transferred sense symbolic significance, representation, or treatment; symbolism.'⁸⁹⁷ What this means for somebody like Ælfric is that the typological exposition of Old Testament texts can be used to illuminate Christian teaching, not just by being a forerunner to the incarnation of Christ, but by symbolically representing him, and other important and complex aspects of Christian theology. A more physical representation could make the invisible mysteries of the gospels easier to understand. Kinane argues that 'Ælfric expresses concern for his diverse audiences' abilities to recognize and interpret literal and figural layers of meaning embedded within texts'.⁸⁹⁸ Also, 'Ælfric's homilies and saints' lives slip easily through time, connecting biblical figures, saints, and the individual audience member through allegory'.⁸⁹⁹ Ælfric

⁸⁹⁶ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 200, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 31, 'And that beginning is God's only begotten Son. Through him God created all things and endowed them all with life through the living Spirit'; Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 213, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 37, 'The holy Word was not changed into flesh, but the Heavenly Prince came here into this world and took up humanity's shape from Mary's womb'.

⁸⁹⁷ 'Type', definition 2:

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/208330?rskey=SjFicY&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> ; 'Typology'

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/208394?redirectedFrom=typology#eid>

⁸⁹⁸ Kinane, 'Interpretative Guide', p. 98.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

roams quite freely throughout scripture, drawing connections, and explaining them to his audience.

For instance, in the sermon *About the People of Israel*, Ælfric takes the story of the manna, the life-giving bread that God provided, coming down from Heaven to sustain his people in the desert during the Exodus, and according to Ælfric ‘se mete awende, on þæs mannes muðe þe þone mete æt, to þæs metes swæcce ðe him sylfum gelicode’.⁹⁰⁰ However, the Hebrews after a time tire of this waybread, and demand real meat. Ælfric is unimpressed, and says ‘[n]u wæron hi oflyste þurh heora unlustas flæsclicra metta, unmægðlice swaþeah, for þam ðe se heofonlica mete hæfde ælcne swæc ælcere werodnysse þe ænig mete hæfð, and wæs eac wurðlicor þonne ða wyrta wæron þe hi æt ham sudon on heora croccum mid flæsce. Se heofonlica mete hæfde þa getacnunge ures Hælendes Cristes, þe com of heofonum to us, þe is engla bigleofa and ealra manna lif þe on hine gelyfað, and hine nu lufiað. Þone acwealdon syððan þæt ylce Iudeisce cynn, and noldon hine habban heora sawlum to bigleofan...’.⁹⁰¹ The Hebrews’ rejection of the manna is equated with the Jews’ rejection of Christ, one of Ælfric’s most reiterated themes. This reflection is bordering on Eucharistic in its tone, and indeed in Ælfric’s most famous homily, II.15, the second series *Sermon on the Sacrifice on Easter-Sunday*, he discusses this text further. Early on in the homily, to the assistance of Matthew Parker and the reformers of the Church of England, he explains some of the types of Christ, while asserting that there is a distinction between Christ and his types: ‘[Crist] is gecweden hlaf þurh getacnunge, and lamb, and leo, and gehu elles; He is hlaf gehaten for ðan ðe he is ure lif and engla; He is lamb gecweden for his unscæððignysse; Leo for ðære strence, þe he oferswiðde þone strangan deofol; Ac swa ðeah, æfter soðum gecynde, nis Crist naðor ne hlaf, ne lamb, ne leo.’⁹⁰²

The types are a way of describing his nature, but are only representative. Later on, when he discusses the Last Supper, Ælfric alludes to manna once more:

⁹⁰⁰ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, II, p. 642, ‘the food changed, in the mouth of the person who ate the food, to the taste of the food that he liked’.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 646-7, ‘now through their bad desires they were possessed with a very strong craving for more meaty food, but immoderately, because the Heavenly food had each flavour of every sweetness that any food had, and was also more precious than the herbs that they cooked at home in their crocks with meat. The heavenly food had the significance of our Saviour Christ, who came from Heaven to us, who is the sustenance of angels and the life of all people who believe in him, and now love him. Later that same Jewish race killed him, and they did not wish to have him as sustenance for their souls’.

⁹⁰² Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, pp. 152-3; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, pp. 268-9, ‘[Christ] is called bread typically, and lamb, and lion, and whatever else. He is called bread, because he is the life of us and of angels; he is called a lamb for his innocence; a lion for the strength wherewith he overcame the strong devil. But yet, according to true nature, Christ is neither bread, nor a lamb, nor a lion.’

he awende ðurh ungesewenlicere mihte þone hlaf to his agenum lichaman, and þæt win to his blode, swa swa he ær dyde on þam westene, ær ðan ðe he to men geboren wurde. ða ða he awende ðone heofenlican mete to his flæsce, and þæt flowende wæter of ðam stane to his agenum blode. Fela manna æton of ðam heofonlican mete on ðam westene, and druncon þone gastlican drenc, and wurdon swa ðeah deade, swa swa Crist sæde; Ne mænde Crist ðone deað þe nan man forbugan ne mæg, ac he mænde þone ecan deað, þe sume of ðam folce for heora geleafleaste geearnodon; Moyses, and Aaron, and manega oðre of ðam folce þe Gode gelicodon æton þone heofenlican hlaf, ac hi næron deade þam ecum deaðe, ðeah ðe hi gemænum deaðe forðferdon; Hi gesawon þæt se heofonlica mete wæs gesewenlic and brosnienlic, ac hi understodon gastlice be ðam gesewenlican ðinge, and hit gastlice ðigdon.⁹⁰³

While the Eucharist could save people from eternal death, the manna could not, though those who ate of the manna might or might not be saved depending on their faith. While it saved them from starvation in the desert, it could only prevent physical death, not spiritual.

The typological example most extensively used by Ælfric also comes from the story of the Exodus. Ælfric refers to the story of the brazen serpent in at least three of his homilies, *About the People of Israel, For the First Sunday after Pentecost* and *For the Fifth Sunday in Lent*, also known as *Passion Sunday*. In each of these homilies, the tale is used for a different purpose. In Numbers 21.7-9, after the Hebrews have been complaining yet again about their hardships during their exodus, God sends serpents who bite and kill many of the people. Then at the pleas of the people, Moses sets up a brazen serpent which people can look at, and, Yahweh promises, survive. This is later referred to in John's gospel: John 3.14-15 says 'et sicut Moses exaltavit serpentem in deserto ita exaltari oportet Filium hominis ut omnis qui credit in ipso non pereat sed habeat vitam aeternam'.⁹⁰⁴

⁹⁰³ Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, p. 156; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, pp. 274-5, 'he changed, through invisible might, the bread to his own body, and the wine to his blood, as he had before done in the wilderness, before he was born as man, when he changed the Heavenly meat to his flesh, and the flowing water from the stone to his own blood. Many men ate of the Heavenly meat in the wilderness, and drank the ghostly drink, and, nevertheless, became dead, as Christ said. Christ meant not the death which no man may avoid, but he meant the eternal death, which some of the people had merited for their unbelief. Moses and Aaron, and many others of the people who were pleasing to God ate the Heavenly bread, but they died not the eternal death, although they departed by the common death. They saw that the Heavenly meat was visible and corruptible, but they understood spiritually concerning the visible thing, and partook of it spiritually.'

⁹⁰⁴ 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting'.

The first sermon to use these texts is from the second series of the Catholic Homilies (II.13), for the *Fifth Sunday in Lent*, of which the text is John 8.46-59, Christ's arguments with the Jews about his divinity and relationship to God the Father. The passage from John 3.14-15 is tacked on at the end, chosen, according to Godden, for its typological reference to the contemplation of the crucified Christ and the healing properties of Christ's death.⁹⁰⁵ Ælfric's exposition here is the most complex and detailed of the three homilies. It is brought in so as to show Christ's control of his situation, and that he was acting according to prophecy. Ælfric says

Hwæt getacnodon þa terendan næddran buton synna on urum deadlicum flæsce; Hwæt wæs seo upahafene næddre buton Cristes deað on rode; Seo ærene næddre hæfde næddran gelicnysse ac heo wæs buton ælcum attre; Swa eac crist hæfde ure gelicnysse ac he næfde nane synne on his leomum, ac ðurh his upahafennysse on ðære rode he gehælde ure synna; Þurh næddran us becom deað and for ði wæs þurh ðære næddran gelicnysse Cristes deað getacnod; Ðæra nædrena geslit wæs deadlic. Cristes deað wæs liflic; Nu behealde we ða næddran þæt seo næddre us ne derige; Hwæt gemænð þæt? We behealdað Cristes deað þæt us se deað ne derige þe of ðære næddran asprang, seo ðe Adam forspeon; Hwæs deað behealde we? Lifes deað; Hwa is lif buton crist?... Crist is lif and swa ðeah he wæs on rode ahangen; He is soð lif and swa ðeah he wæs dead on ðære menniscnysse, na on godcundnysse; On Cristes deaðe wæs se deað adydd, for ðan þe þæt deade lif acwealde ðone deað and he wæs fornumen on Cristes lichaman.⁹⁰⁶

He goes on to call the people to behold the crucified Christ in order to be healed of their sins, comparing them to the Hebrews. However, he strongly emphasises how much more significant is this true healing:

⁹⁰⁵ Godden, *Introduction*, p. 466.

⁹⁰⁶ Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, pp. 135-6; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, pp. 238-41, 'What betokened the tearing serpents but sins in our mortal flesh? What was the up-lifted serpent but the death of Christ on the rood? The brazen serpent had a serpent's likeness, but it was without any poison; in like manner Christ had our likeness, but he had no sin in his members, but by his being raised up on the rood he healed our sins. Through a serpent came death to us, and, therefore, through the likeness of a serpent was Christ's death betokened. The bite of those serpents was mortal, the death of Christ was vital. We now behold the serpent, that the serpent may not hurt us. What does that mean? We behold the death of Christ, that death may not hurt us, which sprang from the serpent which seduced Adam. Whose death do we behold? The death of life. What is life but Christ?... 'Christ is life, and, nevertheless, he was hanged on a rood. He is true life, and, nevertheless, he was dead in his human nature, not in his divine nature. By Christ's death was death destroyed, for that mortal life killed death, and he was annihilated in the body of Christ'.

Hi wæron gehælede fram deaðe to hwilwendlicum life, and her is gecweden þæt we sceolon habban þæt ece lif; Swa micel is betwux þære gehiwodan anlicnysse and ðam soðan ðinge; Seo gehiwode anlicnys getiðode þam toslitenum mannum hwilwendlic lif þæt soðe ðing þe ðurh ða ærenan næddran getacnod wæs, þæt is Cristes deað getiðað us þæt ece lif; þurh treow us com deað, þa ða adam geæt þone forbodenan æppel, and ðurh treow us com eft lif and alysednyss, ða ða crist hangode on rode for ure alysednysse.⁹⁰⁷

This draws the typology tightly together, though as both snakes and venom represent sin, it seems that the form of humanity itself is sinful. Christ takes on the form, but not the content. The wood of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is paralleled with the cross, and the physical healing is yet again paralleled with the spiritual, still emphasising how much more important is the healing of sins. It explains the complex matter of Christ's human nature being dead, but not his divine, and the fact that his mortal death destroyed eternal death.

The text for the next homily, *For the First Sunday after Pentecost*, is the first fifteen verses of John chapter 3, including those mentioned earlier, about when Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, a pharisee and secret disciple. Nicodemus does not understand Jesus' message. The story of Moses would have been well known to a Pharisee, but as Christ in John's gospel associates it with an event that had not yet occurred, it is perhaps no wonder that Nicodemus seems baffled. Ælfric goes through the text verse by verse and explains it. It is only in the final lines of the homily, as in the text, that the serpent and its significance are mentioned: 'Moyses se heretoga on þam micclum westene worhte be Godes hæse ane ærene næddran, þa þa þæt folc wæs fram ðam næddrum tosliten, and he þa up arærde þa ærenan næddran swilce to tacne, and hi besawon þærto þe ðær toslitene wæron, and heom sona wæs bet. Seo ærene næddre, þe buton attre wæs, getacnode Cristes deap, þe unsynnig þrowode, up ahafen on rode; and we to him beseoð mid fullum geleafan, þæt we fram urum synnum þurh hine beon alysyde, and lif habban mid him a on ecnysse, swa swa he us behet'.⁹⁰⁸ It is a much briefer and

⁹⁰⁷ Godden, *Catholic Homilies II*, p. 136; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, pp. 240-1, 'They were healed from death to transitory life, and here it is said that we shall have life everlasting; so great is the difference between the apparent likeness and the true thing: the apparent likeness imparted to the torn men transitory life; the true thing, which was betokened by the brazen serpent, that is, the death of Christ, imparts to us life everlasting. Through a tree death came to us, when Adam ate the forbidden apple, and through a tree life came again to us and redemption, when Christ hung on the rood for our redemption.'

⁹⁰⁸ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, I, p. 489, trans. Butcher, *God of Mercy*, p. 118, 'In the great wilderness, when the nation was bitten by the serpents, Moses the leader made one brass serpent as God commanded. And then he raised up the brass serpent as a sign, and those who had been bitten there looked at it. And immediately they got better. The brass serpent, which was without poison, prefigured the death of Christ, who suffered

simpler explanation than the previous one, but makes the connection of the raised serpent and the cross, and the serpent without venom and Christ without sin. This goes along the same vein of interpretation as in the previous homily, if in less detail, but it rounds off the discussion of the nature of God's Son with a positive exhortation to show faith.

The final sermon, *About the People of Israel*, is the only one that is explicitly focused on the text from Numbers, rather than John. It tells at length of the wilfulness of the Hebrew people, throughout their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Here, the brazen serpent is one example among many of their disobedience, God's punishment, and his mercy after their admission of sin.⁹⁰⁹ Ælfric's interpretation is nothing particularly new after the previous two sermons, but its context does give it a different focus, emphasising the journey of salvation and repeated mistakes, with God's forgiveness and compassion despite human frailty. It again exhorts people to believe in Christ to gain eternal life, but in the context of the extended metaphor of God's people wandering in the desert searching for the Promised Land. Ælfric here focuses more on the negative than in the other two homilies, with God's frequent acts of frustration and vengeance always preceding his compassion. Seeing how much Ælfric focuses on this one depiction of healing, this seems to be one of Ælfric's most important Christological understandings of Christ's mission, and again builds up his image of a *Hælend*.

A good deal more typology is used throughout Ælfric's homilies, and not only to represent Christ. A typical motif, common in Bede but not in the anonymous homilies, is the equation of the Lamb with Christ, as at II.3, relating to the Passover, the Eucharist, and the Lamb of the Apocalypse. The fish is used as a type for Christ at II.6, where also the honeycomb is used to represent Christ's divinity. What Ælfric did with typology was not particularly new, and he acknowledged his dependence on Augustine and others. However, it is interesting to see his apparent fascination with the very tangible imagery of the Exodus, and the way that he is able to make something as distant from Anglo-Saxon England as the Old Testament relevant to his message of God's love and the necessity to have faith.

without sin, lifted up on the cross. And we look to Christ with full belief, and through him we will be delivered from our sins and will always have life with him in eternity, as Christ promised us'.

⁹⁰⁹ Pope, *Supplementary Homilies*, II, pp. 655-6.

Conclusion

Christ is everywhere in Ælfric's homilies. Ælfric's predominant aim is to teach people correctly about Christ, in the hope that they will be inspired to follow him, and merit the salvation that he has made possible through his redeeming act. Ælfric draws on diverse material in so many homilies, but he reiterates the same points about Christ again and again: he is equal with God, has existed since the beginning, and it was always part of the plan that he would come for our redemption. Ælfric mostly leaves it at this, hoping for a response to redemption from his audience, and allowing little space for any preaching on the fear of the end of the world.

CHAPTER V

CRIST IS EALLRA CRISTENRA HEAFOD: THE HOMILIES OF WULFSTAN

Introduction

Wulfstan's homilies

Wulfstan of York, archbishop, statesman and writer, while one of the best-known figures of late Anglo-Saxon England, is often regarded simply as a millenarianist preacher of calamities, obsessed with sin. As Hill has bluntly put it, we 'stereotype him as a denunciatory moralist'.⁹¹⁰ Whilst most students of Old English encounter *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, an excellent example of Wulfstan's rhetoric and style, this presents only one facet of his faith, and of his outlook on the world. His homilies are in fact far more diverse and do not merely project fear of the end of the world, but the preparation that should be done by all Christians in order to reach Heaven, whether or not Doomsday is pending. I agree with Lionarons that

a reading of the full corpus of Wulfstan's homiletic writing confirms that the dominant voice of his work, while admittedly hortatory, is catechetical and didactic rather than merely paranetic, and also reveals a clear pattern with regard to content.⁹¹¹

As archbishop, his primary role was to educate the lay folk about their faith, and to assist priests in their preaching.⁹¹² A comprehensive examination of Wulfstan's homilies, in order to study his depiction of Christ, can shed some light on his beliefs and views, and what he hoped his sermons would achieve in the context of other Anglo-Saxon homiletic literature. Wulfstan's writing shows only a limited interest in the person of his Christ, yet his Christian beliefs are fundamental as he tries to bring people more in line to follow the teachings of Christ and his church, in order to have a positive outcome in the hereafter.

Wulfstan

We know nothing about Wulfstan's early life or origins, but Wormald has concluded from his burial and commemoration at Ely that he was probably from the Southern Danelaw, possibly even the Fenlands.⁹¹³ He died on 28 May 1023.⁹¹⁴ According to William of Malmesbury's

⁹¹⁰ Hill, *Archbishop Wulfstan: Reformer?*, p. 309.

⁹¹¹ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 5.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹¹³ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 12.

⁹¹⁴ Crook 'Vir Optimus Wulfstanus', p. 503.

twelfth-century *Vita Wulfstani*, Wulfstan had two brothers, and his father was a priest and a monk.⁹¹⁵ His dialect gives away little about his origins, with most of the words written by his hand being common Old English or West Saxon.⁹¹⁶ There is little indication that Wulfstan was a monk or received an Æthelwoldian education,⁹¹⁷ though Bethurum believed he was a Benedictine, closely linked with the reform.⁹¹⁸ Despite his importance in the world of the church, he must have felt some insecurity regarding his knowledge of doctrine, as is evinced by his correspondence with Ælfric.⁹¹⁹ The first evidence of his existence is his distinctive *Lupus* used as an attestation in charters, while Bishop of London, 996-1002/3.⁹²⁰ Thereafter he became prominent in several aspects of Anglo-Saxon society, holding concurrently the posts of Bishop of Worcester 1002-16, which he may have retained to his death,⁹²¹ and Archbishop of York 1002-23. Though a man of God and a preacher highly concerned about the spiritual welfare of his people, in his episcopal roles, Wulfstan took on the duties and attributes of a statesman. Dorothy Bethurum likened his role to that of a prime minister,⁹²² and certainly his influence and responsibility must have been considerable. As Archbishop of York he was one of the most important of Æthelred's advisors and legislators, and he thrived in the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Danish rule with Cnut's conquest in 1016, remaining a member of the *witan* and legislating for the new king.⁹²³ Wulfstan's popularity did have its limitations, however, and though the miraculous preservation of his vestments was considered indicative of his sanctity in the twelfth century, there must have been some ambivalence about his character, as even the monks at Ely were unwilling to call him 'saint', but preferred *vir optimus* (the best man).⁹²⁴

Edition

Lionarons counts twenty manuscripts containing Wulfstan's homilies, though most can be found in just two: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 and CCC 201.⁹²⁵ There is currently no entirely satisfactory edition of Wulfstan's homilies, though fortunately there has been some excellent critical writing in recent years which has developed a consensus about which

⁹¹⁵ Barrow, 'Wulfstan and Worcester', p. 156.

⁹¹⁶ Dance, 'Sound, Fury, and Signifiers', p. 46.

⁹¹⁷ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 13.

⁹¹⁸ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 57.

⁹¹⁹ Godden, 'Wulfstan and Ælfric', p. 374.

⁹²⁰ Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 311.

⁹²¹ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 12.

⁹²² Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 87.

⁹²³ Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 311.

⁹²⁴ Crook, 'Vir Optimus Wulfstanus', p. 524.

⁹²⁵ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 12.

texts are legitimately Wulfstanian, and which ones can justifiably be defined as homilies. Napier's comprehensive edition contains a number of texts that are no longer believed to have been composed by Wulfstan, and which Napier himself may not have definitively attributed to him, as his intended commentary on the homilies was never completed.⁹²⁶ Dorothy Bethurum's edition omitted a number of Napier's homilies with the intention of keeping just texts that were definitely Wulfstan's, and definitely homilies.⁹²⁷ Her approach has been criticised particularly for its sometimes haphazard selection and rejection of texts, and its confusion of the manuscript evidence by attempting to make a 'best' text.⁹²⁸ Lionarons considers it out of date and incomplete, and highlights the importance of manuscript study in light of 'efforts by editors like Dorothy Bethurum to erase the evidence of such rewriting to produce a corpus of polished, finished sermons', a false idea since Wulfstan revised not only the work of his predecessors, but also his own.⁹²⁹ Orchard is critical of her choice not to follow the punctuation of the manuscripts.⁹³⁰ In contemporary reviews, Ure judged Bethurum's to be less useful than Napier's earlier edition, though recognising its necessary updating of material,⁹³¹ while Pope was much more positive, particularly regarding the selection of texts.⁹³² At present, Bethurum's edition is the best to use for the purpose and scope of this thesis, without resorting to textual criticism of the manuscripts myself. While it is not the definitive edition of homilies that Andy Orchard is working on, and more could no doubt be said about the rejected texts, those selected by Bethurum provide enough breadth for the purpose of this thesis, and her text is far more accessible than Napier's out-of-print edition.

Homiletic texts

The corpus of Wulfstan's homilies is not straightforward. Unlike Ælfric, Wulfstan did not issue his homilies as a set.⁹³³ He wrote homilies in both Old English and Latin, often versions of the same homilies. The Latin texts have sometimes been considered drafts preceding the Old English, but Hall questions this with his examination of *Admonitio episcoporum utilis*.⁹³⁴ We can identify fewer homilies in his Latin corpus than in Old English, at least partly

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹³⁰ Orchard, 'Re-editing Wulfstan', p. 65.

⁹³¹ Ure, *Review*, p. 115.

⁹³² Pope, *Review*, p. 338.

⁹³³ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 18.

⁹³⁴ Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', pp. 108-9.

because we have fewer ways of identifying the texts.⁹³⁵ Lionarons has re-established the canon, adding to Bethurum's selection a number of Napier's homilies and other texts.⁹³⁶

Despite the era in which Wulfstan wrote, because he is thoroughly unmonastic he is not usually thought of in the context of the Benedictine Reform,⁹³⁷ though his Carolingian interests do show that he is a product of it.⁹³⁸ Compared to contemporary monks, such as Ælfric, his corpus is more diverse, with a different tone, and a secular context, and less obvious reliance on the authority of other texts.⁹³⁹

The standard term for preaching material in Old English is 'homily', which I will continue to use, though Lionarons has pointed out that Bethurum's texts are rather sermons, and defines 'homiletic' as any texts which show signs of being designed for preaching, including law-codes and the *Institutes of Polity*.⁹⁴⁰ She contends that '[t]he roles of homilist and statesman were rarely if ever separated in Wulfstan's mind or in his works'.⁹⁴¹ Just as Wulfstan's roles as archbishop and statesman overlapped, his genres of writing are fluid, with homilies and law-codes sharing many common features and difficult to separate fully. Giandrea has argued that the modern idea of *genre* has obscured the goals of Wulfstan's programme, which was to use every means at his disposal to stress that the woes of the Anglo-Saxons were due to their lack of faith.⁹⁴² Wulfstan discusses similar themes in the two genres, including loyalty to God and king, adherence to divine law and church protocols, Christian moral teaching, and eschatology.⁹⁴³ He used the same vocabulary and style in his law-codes and in his preaching,⁹⁴⁴ starting off more homiletic, and becoming more legalistic.⁹⁴⁵ As Heslop concisely puts it,

Wulfstan contrives to write law-codes laden with Christian morality while producing homilies which aim at social engineering. Wulfstan's message as much as his style seems to have been remarkably consistent, the perceptible differences between his

⁹³⁵ Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, p. 146.

⁹³⁶ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, pp. 23-42, especially p. 42.

⁹³⁷ Hill, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Refomer?', p. 310.

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 321 and 324.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹⁴⁰ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 25, 28.

⁹⁴¹ Lionarons, 'Napier Homily L', p. 413.

⁹⁴² Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, p. 38.

⁹⁴³ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 3.

⁹⁴⁴ Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 319.

⁹⁴⁵ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 17.

writings being apparently less important to him than their underlying singleness of purpose.⁹⁴⁶

Wormald believed Wulfstan intended his laws and homilies to be as generic as possible.⁹⁴⁷ *VII Æthelred* is a classic example of a homiletic law-code: it exhorts the people to change their ways and repent, prescribing a specific course of prayer and penance for the whole country to undertake in order to try to win God's favour again and fend off the Vikings.⁹⁴⁸ Wulfstan's priority was 'to fortify a Christian society to meet first its arch-enemy, Antichrist, and then its Maker, Christ himself in clouds descending'.⁹⁴⁹ While he might be noticeably different from the other Anglo-Saxon homilists in his purpose, Wulfstan had continental contemporaries who also thought that the emergencies of their day demanded that more attention be paid to the law of God and his church.⁹⁵⁰ Moreover, Wormald argues that Wulfstan's conjunction of law and homily was a logical response to the Carolingian concept of bishops as servants of God and the king,⁹⁵¹ writing on behalf of both.

Yet, while the boundary between exhortatory sermon and legal instruction may be blurred, a good many of Wulfstan's homilies are almost entirely focused on scripture and church customs, and make no comment on present circumstances, other than a fairly general admonition to turn from sin and repent.

Other writing

As mentioned above, Wulfstan by no measure only produced homilies, but was also a prolific writer of law-codes and other texts. The Old English prose translation of the Benedictine Office is attributed to him, though it is probably a revision of a version written by somebody else.⁹⁵² It uses a simplified adaptation of the monastic office, as used in Worcester.⁹⁵³ This text includes a characteristic use of verb pairs, and some Wulfstanian vocabulary.⁹⁵⁴

Wulfstan was the author of the *Institutes of Polity*, which shows some interesting perspectives on kingship: he commences by speaking of the Heavenly King, before moving on to the Christian king who must do right in order to guide the Christian people, for whom

⁹⁴⁶ Heslop, 'Art and the Man', p. 303.

⁹⁴⁷ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 14.

⁹⁴⁸ Keynes, 'An Abbot', p. 180.

⁹⁴⁹ Wormald, 'Eleventh-Century State-BUILDER', p. 17.

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁵² Ure, *Benedictine Office*, p. 25.

⁹⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

he must be the comfort and the righteous shepherd,⁹⁵⁵ both Christological images used in Wulfstan's homilies. Later he warns that bad things happen to people because of a bad king, and conversely that a people will become happy and victorious through a king's wisdom.⁹⁵⁶ Kingship and pastoral care were major issues in Wulfstan's setting, and this is reflected in both his applied and homiletic texts.

Fowler has edited *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar*, which relate to the catechetical homilies in their intention and characteristics,⁹⁵⁷ and in his opinion they contain little that cannot be found elsewhere in Wulfstan's writing.⁹⁵⁸ However, his contention that the *Canons* are made up of 'excerpts from authoritative sources' seems at odds with the notion expressed by other scholars that Wulfstan seldom relied directly on written authorities.⁹⁵⁹ The canons mostly focus on the duties of the clergy, particularly regarding how to deal with the morality of laymen.⁹⁶⁰

Wulfstan's canon laws include topics such as regulations for priests and bishops, linking their responsibilities back to Christ's distribution of talents, and describing them as Christ's spiritual children, through his virgin bride, the church.⁹⁶¹ Episodes from Christ's passion are used as precedents, such as Christ forbidding Peter to use his sword given as the reason that soldiers of Christ should not use weapons, and the tonsure being Peter's imitation of the crown of thorns.⁹⁶² Many details of these texts, given their natures, are mundane and far from oratorical, but Wulfstan does show consistent concerns, particularly regarding the leadership of the church and nation, which are carried through into his homilies with more of a focus on Christ and God in these leading roles.

Style

The style of Wulfstan's writing is more often discussed than its content, though he particularly put his rhetoric to work as a teacher of the Church's 'social discipline'.⁹⁶³ Gatch says

⁹⁵⁵ Jost, *Institutes of Polity*, p. 41.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁹⁵⁷ Fowler, *Canons*, p. xxix.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. li-lii.

⁹⁶¹ Cross and Hamer, *Canon Law*, p. 162.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 166 and 170.

⁹⁶³ Loyn, *The English Church*, p. 26.

[t]he lack of precision in Wulfstan's canonistic writing confirms the impression given by the homilies themselves: that the archbishop was more concerned with the preaching office as a moral and instructional function than as a vehicle for systematic exposition of the Scriptures. Most of his preaching to the laity might have been set outside the liturgy.⁹⁶⁴

He has a very distinctive rhythmical style which was copied by some later homilists. The corpus of his work can mostly be identified on the basis of style,⁹⁶⁵ though his later imitators make this difficult evidence to use. He rarely uses poetic diction, and clarity is a particularly characteristic feature of his writing.⁹⁶⁶ As an orator, he focused particularly on rhetorical effect, with word pairs, alliteration and listing all being dominant features, sometimes created by distinctive compounds.⁹⁶⁷ Angus McIntosh claimed that his style was rhythmically distinct, with a continuous series of two-stress phrases, none with more than four syllables, and small syntactic units, linked to Old English verse.⁹⁶⁸ Sheets disputed this, suggesting Wulfstan intended larger groupings of syllables, and connecting this style rather to Latin rhetoric and church liturgy.⁹⁶⁹ Jurovics sees Wulfstan's rhetoric as inspired by the tradition begun by Cicero, continued by Augustine, and later taken up by the likes of Isidore of Seville.⁹⁷⁰ This does seem a bit of a wishful stretch, though of course inspiration does not always carry over to reality. Orchard argues that Wulfstan's Old English syntax does not match the structure of his Latin sources.⁹⁷¹ Rather, he believes that the basis for Wulfstan's style is still unknown, though he sees parallels to the Vercelli homilies.⁹⁷² Like the Vercelli homilist, Wulfstan prefers to use the subjunctive mood, in order to urge his congregation to penance.⁹⁷³ Dance considers that he shows elements of late-West Saxon style, but deliberately outside the scholarly tradition of Winchester, the Benedictine Reform, and Ælfric.⁹⁷⁴ Wulfstan's writing was affective and appealing. As Godfrey succinctly puts it, '[t]here was something of a prophet in Wulfstan'.⁹⁷⁵ Despite the changing political and

⁹⁶⁴ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 45.

⁹⁶⁵ Wilcox, 'Wolf on Shepherds', p. 395.

⁹⁶⁶ Dance, 'Sound, Fury, and Signifiers', pp. 60-1.

⁹⁶⁷ Chapman, 'Poetic Compounding', p. 414.

⁹⁶⁸ McIntosh, *Wulfstan's Prose*, pp. 10-1.

⁹⁶⁹ Sheets, *Wulfstan's Prose*, pp. 120-1.

⁹⁷⁰ Jurovics, 'Moral Purpose', p. 206.

⁹⁷¹ Orchard, 'Crying Wolf', p. 240.

⁹⁷² Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 332.

⁹⁷³ Loyn, *The English Church*, p. 55.

⁹⁷⁴ Dance, 'Sound, Fury, and Signifiers', p. 61.

⁹⁷⁵ Godfrey, 'The Church', p. 344.

ecclesiastical environment, not to mention language, his texts remained popular and were recopied into the twelfth century.⁹⁷⁶

Theology

Wulfstan's homiletic writing is usually thematic, rather than scriptural, and he is not particularly concerned to attribute his texts to authoritative figures. Indeed, Gregory, mentioned just once, is the only patristic author acknowledged by Wulfstan in the homilies in Bethurum's edition.⁹⁷⁷ Hill suggests that he more commonly used more recent authors,⁹⁷⁸ though these, even Ælfric, are not acknowledged.

As noted above, Wulfstan's interest was in the moral and instructional function of preaching, rather than scriptural exposition.⁹⁷⁹ In his determination to be plain-speaking, Wulfstan, so Gatch argues, 'made it a point to avoid theological subtlety, to drop exempla and most traces of allegorical interpretation and, usually, to delete specific historical allusions'.⁹⁸⁰ Jost considers Wulfstan's theology to be of his times, not innovative, and yet that it can show some personal conception of Christianity,⁹⁸¹ which he expresses as the polarity of 'right' and 'wrong', rather than 'good' and 'evil'. 'Right' is derived from God's will, law, and teachings. The love of God in Wulfstan's writing is expressed by devotion to the law. The duty of the Christian is to love right and shun wrong, and the bishop is required to proclaim these differences.⁹⁸² Wormald sees Wulfstan as 'practically blind' to the distinction between sins and crimes.⁹⁸³ Interestingly, despite this legalistic focus, Dance notes an avoidance of 'guilt' words in Wulfstan's homilies.⁹⁸⁴

Adaptation of sources

Wulfstan relied on other authors to provide him with the framework and substance of his sermons.⁹⁸⁵ While his content is often unoriginal, Wulfstan does rewrite the texts he uses, with his 'dramatic recasting' an important aspect of his style.⁹⁸⁶ He was a prolific editor, and

⁹⁷⁶ Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 316.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁹⁷⁸ Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', p. 20.

⁹⁷⁹ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 19.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁸¹ Jost, *Wulfstanstudien*, p. 168.

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

⁹⁸³ Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 342.

⁹⁸⁴ Dance, 'Sound, Fury, and Signifiers', pp. 56-7.

⁹⁸⁵ Orchard, 'Wulfstan as Reader', p. 335.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-6.

would sometimes go on to entirely rewrite his own homilies.⁹⁸⁷ Compared to Ælfric, Wulfstan's interest in doctrine is cursory. Yet, the basis for any of Wulfstan's moralising lies in his understanding of the Christian faith, which ultimately derives from Christ and the gospels. Ælfric's writing was a major source for Wulfstan, who expanded it with his own words and phrases,⁹⁸⁸ but it seems likely that Ælfric would not have appreciated his homilies being rewritten to show Wulfstan's different opinions and emphases.⁹⁸⁹ While Ælfric sees human sin coming from personal responsibility and free will, Wulfstan attributes it to the devil.⁹⁹⁰ Ælfric conceives of a cycle of fall and redemption, while Wulfstan depicts recurrent cycles of sin and punishment.⁹⁹¹ Lees argues that '[e]verything Wulfstan writes can be read as a response to Ælfric'.⁹⁹² To Wormald, this response is that a people of God should answer persecution with spotlessness,⁹⁹³ which could be achieved through the programme of penance which Wulfstan set out.

Penance

Penance was a dominant issue for Wulfstan, and plays an important part in his writing, and in programmes of national significance, such as the penance of 1009.⁹⁹⁴ He prescribed 'a distinctly spiritual remedy for the national troubles', with all the English coming together in prayer and penitence, with three days of fasting.⁹⁹⁵ Frantzen, in his monograph on the subject, notes that penance was not a punishment, but a cure.⁹⁹⁶ Public penance relied on the power of a bishop, such as Wulfstan, whereas private penance was all between the confessor and sinner.⁹⁹⁷ Wulfstan envisaged a system of both public and private penance, like that of the Carolingian reformers, but his homilies are not proof of accompanying liturgy.⁹⁹⁸ Wulfstan relies on Ælfric in his interest in penance,⁹⁹⁹ and applied this heavily to his setting. As Frantzen says later, '[u]nder Wulfstan, penitential discipline penetrated more deeply into the secular legislation than before'.¹⁰⁰⁰ Around the time Wulfstan wrote the *VII Æthelred* law-code, advocating a nation-wide penitential scheme, silver *Agnus Dei* pennies were being

⁹⁸⁷ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 19.

⁹⁸⁸ Orchard, 'Crying Wolf', p. 245.

⁹⁸⁹ Godden, 'Wulfstan and Ælfric', p. 373.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁹⁹² Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 104.

⁹⁹³ Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 456.

⁹⁹⁴ Godfrey, 'The Church', p. 403.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁹⁹⁶ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 3.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁹⁸ Hamilton, 'Rites for Public Penance', pp. 65 and 71.

⁹⁹⁹ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

minted, one side with a picture of the Lamb of God, and the other with a dove.¹⁰⁰¹ These images reflect a desire for mercy and peace at a time of Viking attacks on England. While these issues come up in Wulfstan's writing, he does not use either of these images, though they are fairly standard for both Bede and Ælfric. Wulfstan's Christology was unadorned, with little need for the imagery and symbolism the theologians of the church could supply.

Christ

While Wulfstan does not explicitly examine the character and role of Christ, the instructions of his sermons and the Lord mentioned therein do reveal a considerable amount regarding Wulfstan's perception of who Christ is and what he signifies. The role of Christ in the homilies is not always straightforward. Christ himself is mentioned fairly seldom, in some homilies less so than the Antichrist. The four sermons that examine gospel texts depict scenes from Christ's life, usually teaching his disciples. Wulfstan also discusses the Creed, which covers all of the core beliefs about Christ and his relationship to God. Christ is, unsurprisingly, the basis for the sermon *About Christianity*, and he has a fairly significant role in Wulfstan's sermons on baptism. However, besides these few notable examples, Wulfstan generally talks about God in a less specific way, not often denoting any one part of the Trinity. In several homilies he discusses the Old Testament, in which Christ is of course not present, though he is at times alluded to. On the whole, throughout his teaching, Wulfstan is far more likely to speak about God than about Christ. Wulfstan uses about fifty different terms to denote God and the different aspects of the Trinity. About a third of them actually refer to God the Son, but the frequency of their occurrences is not particularly high. Orchard notes that the devil is twice as popular as Christ throughout the sermons, though only a quarter as popular as God.¹⁰⁰² Wulfstan uses the name of 'Christ' with a surprising infrequency, approximately seventy times in Old English (*Crist*), and a further twenty-three in Latin (*Cristus*), though he talks about 'God' generally a lot, at about 443 attestations in Old English (*God*) and a further thirty-four in Latin (*Deus*). However, just because Christ is not explicitly mentioned does not mean that it is not the incarnate Saviour that Wulfstan is thinking of when he speaks of God: 'God' does not necessarily mean 'God the Father', just as the poet of *Dream of the Rood* could say of the one on the cross 'þæt wæs God Ælmihtig'¹⁰⁰³. As such, when I examine the role of Christ below, I am looking at how the Christological aspects of God are presented, not necessarily only where Christ the man is mentioned.

¹⁰⁰¹ Keynes, 'An Abbot', p. 190.

¹⁰⁰² Orchard, 'Crying Wolf', p. 249.

¹⁰⁰³ Krapp, *Vercelli Book*, p. 62, line 39b. See further in Chapter 2, The Vercelli Book, *Dream of the Rood*.

Wulfstan uses a far more limited lexicon than Ælfric,¹⁰⁰⁴ and this extends to his terms for God. Notably, as Orchard has pointed out already, he uses *Dryhten* rather than *Hælend*,¹⁰⁰⁵ significant in the limited interest he shows in the figure of Jesus as opposed to the authoritative and unspecified deity who matters most for his teaching. Yet, even this is comparatively limited: ‘Lord’ is the name used most frequently after ‘God’ and ‘Christ’, but here it is interesting to note that the balance changes, and despite a proportion of twenty-five primarily Old English texts (albeit some with lengthy Latin pericopes and glosses throughout) to four in Latin, there are only thirty-eight occurrences of *Lord* in Old English (*Dryhten*) as opposed to seventy in Latin (*Dominus*).

Wulfstan does not appear to be overly concerned with demystifying the Trinity. The Trinity itself is only mentioned three times;¹⁰⁰⁶ *Fæder* and variants are used twenty times, many referring to the *Pater Noster* or Creed;¹⁰⁰⁷ *Sunu* and variants eleven times, some referring to imposters rather than Christ himself;¹⁰⁰⁸ and names for *Halga Gast* eleven times.¹⁰⁰⁹ The lack of clear interest in members of the Trinity highlights the importance of looking to the divine in general while reading Wulfstan’s homilies, in order to examine a Christology that is not always explicit.

Structure

Wulfstan’s homilies have been categorised by Bethurum as eschatological or catechetical, or as concerned with archiepiscopal functions, or with ‘evil times’. While these divisions are to a certain extent arbitrary, they are a convenient way of dividing the corpus into smaller portions for examination. Unlike the anonymous homilies, we know that Wulfstan’s homilies were written from a single viewpoint, which is fairly consistent across the range of his texts. Therefore, it is not always necessary to go through each of the homilies separately as individual works selected by a compiler; rather, I will discuss each group or sub-group of homilies, where suitable, and describe and analyse the presentation of Christ in each context.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Orchard, ‘Crying Wolf’, p. 245.

¹⁰⁰⁶ In English as *Ælmihtig God on prym hadum*; twice in Latin as *Trinitas in Unitate* and *Unus Deus in Trinitate*.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Fæder* 3; *Fæder Ælmihtig* 1; *Heofonlica Fæder* 1; *Ure Fæder* 1; *Ure ealra Fæder* 1; *Pater* 4; *Pater Noster* 9.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Sunu* 2; *Godes Sunu* 5; *his Sunu* 1; *Godes Agen Bearn* 1; *Filius* 2.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Halga Gast* 6; *Godes Gast* 1; *Spiritus Sanctus* 2; *Soða Wisdom* 1; *Soð Help* 1, the last two particularly favoured by Ælfric and indicating his direct influence.

The Eschatological Homilies

Eschatology, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is '[t]he department of theological science concerned with "the four last things: death, judgement, Heaven, and Hell"'.¹⁰¹⁰ This is the primary topic for which Wulfstan's homilies are known, and it is referred to in a good deal of his writing, though only half-a-dozen of his homilies actually focus primarily on eschatology. Patristic sources Wulfstan uses include Adso, Augustine, Gregory and Isidore, with Ælfric the basis for *De Temporibus Anticristi* and *Secundum Marcum*. Wulfstan probably started preaching about the Antichrist in the 990s, and was still doing so twenty years later with *Sermo Lupi*,¹⁰¹¹ but references to the Antichrist are dropped in Wulfstan's later homilies, suggesting they were very much of their time, and with fears about the millennium becoming less relevant.¹⁰¹² Gatch says of Wulfstan: '[c]onvinced that he lived in the last days, he exhorted priest and layman alike to resist the deceitful teachings of God's enemies and to present themselves as righteous followers of God's law and of true Christian teaching at the Last Day'.¹⁰¹³ Unlike the anonymous homilies, Wulfstan's eschatology focuses on the current times as approaching the last days of the earth and the coming of the Antichrist, rather than Judgement before the Heavenly Throne. Because of this, his eschatological homilies do not have much to say about Christ himself, though three of them start with pericopes that show Christ teaching his disciples and warning them about the end of the world. Wulfstan addresses these texts only briefly, before going on to speak more of the last days and the Antichrist. As such, the exploration of who Wulfstan's Christ is can perhaps best be approached by looking at who he is not, that is, the opposite to Christ: the Antichrist. Although Wulfstan emphasises different aspects of his eschatology in these six homilies, he is remarkably consistent on the whole and presents a detailed and comprehensive illustration of the Antichrist. While Christ does have a role separate from the Antichrist, it is a small one.

¹⁰¹⁰ OED, definition a, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/64274?redirectedFrom=eschatology#eid>

¹⁰¹¹ Keynes, 'An Abbot', p. 172.

¹⁰¹² Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 114.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Christ

The Christ depicted in the eschatological homilies is primarily a testing and judging one, though his goodness and compassion are also evident. Christ repaying people for their deeds is a major concept in these homilies, as is evident when Wulfstan exhorts people to follow God's will so that he might repay them when they need it. The sermon for the text from the Second Book of Matthew says that 'and on þam dome, þe ealle men to sculan, ure drihten sylf eowað us sona his blodigan sidan 7 his þyrlan handa 7 ða sylfan rode þe he for ure neode on ahangen wæs, 7 wile þonne anrædlice witan hu we him þæt geleanedan, 7 hu we urne cristendom gehealden habban'.¹⁰¹⁴ Here, Christ seems to be both plaintiff and Judge, expecting recompense and making the final decisions. At Judgement Day everyone will be accountable for their deeds, and will be rewarded as they have deserved in life. In the homily *Secundum Marcum*, as in other, non-eschatological homilies such as *De Fide Catholica*, Christ will thank those who were loyal and obeyed him for all they endured, and send them to Heaven. Wulfstan wants people to improve their behaviour, and he gives the motivation of fear, rather than compunction and the desire to respond to Christ's work. The promise of Christ's repayment for deeds, whether good or bad, is a good incentive for people to reflect upon their lives and areas for improvement.

Wulfstan barely touches on any hagiography in sermons, so it is interesting to note that the one fleeting role he gives the genre is here, using it as an image of the power of Christ in contrast to the Antichrist. He mentions in *De Temporibus Anticristi* the story of Peter and Paul standing up to Simon the Mage,¹⁰¹⁵ who claimed to be the Son of God. Through Christ's power, Peter is able to save. The point of this story is to emphasise the need to persevere in faith despite hardships, and to give an example of how the Antichrist will try to deceive.

Who is Antichrist?

From all this, two different, but not necessarily contradictory, descriptions of the Antichrist emerge. The Antichrist is described in both the singular and plural. He is first defined in *De Anticristo* and *Secundum Lucam* as those who profess correct Christianity but do not live by it or teach it: they are, therefore, literally 'contrarius Christi', or in English 'godes

¹⁰¹⁴ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 121; translation from Lionarons, *Eschatological Homilies*, 'And at that judgment, to which all people must go, our Lord himself will immediately show us his bloody side and his pierced hands and the very cross on which he was hung for our need; and he will surely know how we have repaid him and how we have held our Christianity'.

¹⁰¹⁵ See further in Blickling XV.

wiðersaca'.¹⁰¹⁶ These are the people who abandon God's laws, and living in sin lead others into sin. Conversely, those who are 'Christs', or Christ-like, must follow God's teaching and laws. *De Anticristo* and *De Temporibus Anticristi* go on to say that many people will not see him, but his limbs will be found and known by their evil. This suggests that those 'contrary to Christ', mentioned earlier, might better be described as limbs of the Antichrist, or anti-Christ in an adjectival rather than nominal way.

The Antichrist can also be seen as a single figure, opposite to the historical Christ. *De Temporibus Anticristi* describes the nature of the Antichrist as the polar opposite to Christ: just as Christ is true God and true man, the Antichrist will be true devil and true man, and will be entirely filled with the devil's spirit. Wulfstan did not use Adso's details of the life of the Antichrist, because his own interests were purely moral.¹⁰¹⁷ For Adso, the Antichrist was born in the natural way, but Satan co-operated in his conception and he became the product of an incestuous union.¹⁰¹⁸ The legend of the Antichrist also came to England through the writings of Augustus, Jerome, Gregory, Bede, Sulpicius Severus and Ambrose, though Bethurum is unsure of the intermediary sources.¹⁰¹⁹ As Christ came as a comfort and help to all the earth, so the Antichrist came to bring terror and affliction. Whereas Christ healed many who were unhealthy in life, the Antichrist will injure and make ill the healthy, and then pretend to heal them. The Antichrist will be known for his false teaching. The homily also suggests that the Antichrist is the devil's son, putting him in direct contrast to Christ as Son of God.

Christ is also described in reference, rather than comparison, to the Antichrist, though in a more limited fashion. For example, *De Anticristo* says that faith in Christ strengthens one against the Antichrist. It also asserts that the Lord will shorten the days of the Antichrist in order to preserve the faithful. The second sermon, *Secundum Matheum*, starts with the pericope of Christ's apostles asking him about his coming at the end of the world. Jesus warns them not to be seduced, and says that many will come in his name, clearly referring to the Antichrist. In both of these sermons, Wulfstan either says himself, or quotes Jesus saying, that only the Father knows the exact timing of things. A point brought up in *Secundum Marcum* links the historical Jesus with the coming of the Antichrist. Because it is a thousand years since Christ came in his human form, Satan's bonds are very loose. The Antichrist will

¹⁰¹⁶ Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 113 and 116, 'contrary to Christ', 'God's adversary'.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

deny Christ, saying he himself is God's son, and bringing people to heresy. *Secundum Matheum* also says that Christ meant us to know the pain that would come into the world at the time of the Antichrist. On the whole, these references show a loving and compassionate side of Christ, wishing to help his people as much as possible; on the other hand, the final reference shows him wishing them to experience suffering, and perhaps to be purged of sin, or at least to have faith tested.

Allowing Antichrist power

The sermon on *De Temporibus Anticristi* says that 'Leofan men, God gepafað þam deofle antecriste þæt he mot ehtan godra manna, forðam þe hi sculon, swa ic ær cwæð, ðurh ða ehtnesse beon geclænsode 7 syððan clæne faran to heofona rice'.¹⁰²⁰ No matter how good the Christians, in *De Anticristo* and other texts Wulfstan speaks of the inevitability of all people ultimately being seduced by the Antichrist, unless God should first intervene and save the most faithful. Though the end result will be positive, the time approaching Doomsday will be a challenge for those who hold the law, as in the homily for *Secundum Marcum*:

7 þa ðe swa gesælige þonne weorþað þæt hi godes lage healdað on an swyðe georne 7 on rihtan geleafan anrædlice þurhwunian willað, þa sculon þolian ehtnesse þa mæstan þe æfre ær on worulde ænige men þoledon... [a]c se bið gesælig þe þonne ne awacað, forðam raðe æfter þam witod him bið towerd þurh godes mihte ece frofer... 7 ða þonne witodlice þe nu god lufiað 7 godes lagum fylgeað 7 godes lare geornlice hlystað 7 hy wel healdað 7 anrædlice þurhwuniað on rihtan geleafan forð oð heora ende, þa scylan habban ece edlean on heofonlicre myrhðe mid gode sylfum æfter þam dome 7 mid his halgum þananforð æfre.¹⁰²¹

Thus the best Christians, and those who will have the shortest route to Heaven, are those that can endure the great persecution the longest, undertaking their purging while on earth, and who recognise the Antichrist to be fraudulent.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130; translation from Lionarons, *Eschatological Homilies*, 'Beloved people, God permits to the devil Antichrist that he might persecute good men, because they must, as I said before, be cleansed through the persecution and afterwards go clean into the kingdom of Heaven'.

¹⁰²¹ Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 139-41; translation from Lionarons, *Eschatological Homilies*, 'And those who are so blessed that they hold to God's law very earnestly and steadfastly persevere in correct belief will then endure the greatest persecution that ever any people have endured before in the world... but he will be blessed who does not weaken, because quickly afterwards eternal comfort will certainly come to him through God's power... certainly those who now love God and follow God's laws and earnestly obey God's teachings and hold them well, and who steadfastly persevere in correct belief until the end, they will have eternal reward in Heavenly joy with God himself and with his saints forever afterward'.

Secundum Lucan makes it clear that the reason that the Antichrist will come into the world is because people do not obey or have faith in the Lord as they should, or disbelieve his might and mercy, or anger him. Christ warned in the gospel that bad things would happen because of this. Indeed, Wulfstan goes further here. Not only will the Antichrist oppress and strive against people, but so will creation. After all, the world was clean at Creation, but later became *afylede*, ‘befouled’ through our sins.¹⁰²² The world fights for God against ‘insensible men’. In this sermon, Wulfstan goes on to describe the time of the Antichrist: the world will grow dark; God will not reveal his strength, nor will his saints perform miracles, which according to *Secundum Marcum* causes people to repent, and he will allow the Antichrist to run riot so that false Christians might be revealed. After this time the hosts of Heaven will be roused ‘through divine might’, and the earth-dwellers will be raised from death to Judgement. Non-believers will know that Christ in his majesty will repay people for their earlier deeds. Wulfstan finally invokes his congregation to protect themselves, by loving God and working his will, so that he will repay them when they most need it.

De Temporibus Anticristi repeats much of what has already been covered, for instance, the point that although God will allow the Antichrist to entice people as they are ruined by sin, he will shorten the days of the Antichrist in order to save his chosen people. This point is also made in *Secundum Marcum*, after a discussion of the miracles performed by the Antichrist, and his three-and-a-half-year rule. Emphasis is placed on the blessings and eternal comfort to be received by those who do not fall for the Antichrist. Wulfstan also refers to Enoch and Elias being preserved by God for thousands of years so that they might strengthen people with their teaching; they are martyred, and all would perish if God did not shorten the days of the Antichrist. He adds that this time of trial will allow the steadfast to be cleansed of any sin more quickly, since nobody can go to God’s kingdom until purified of sin. Again, he recommends prayer to Almighty God so as to protect and strengthen his audience, and that we warn ourselves, in order to earn protection from God, with resolute belief and steadfast attention to our Lord. Wulfstan says that only Almighty God’s protection can prevent the deception of the devil (in the form of the Antichrist). Wulfstan’s advice for this time, as in *De Anticristo*, is to pray to Almighty God for help against the arch-criminal, and for God’s preachers to warn his people constantly, so that God’s people should not be lost through want of instruction.

¹⁰²² Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 124, ‘befouled’.

There are several consistent messages that come through regarding Christ's role in relation to the Antichrist: firstly, he (God) allowed the Antichrist to come, so that people could be tested. Secondly, he was compassionate, and shortened the rule of the Antichrist so that the faithful would not be ruined. Thirdly, praying for help will strengthen and protect those who earnestly believe in God. Christ is not at the heart of these sermons, but he is an unspoken presence, and it is at least partly so as to bring people back into line with his teaching that they were composed.

What Antichrist does

The Antichrist and his ministers will torment Christians. The sermon *Secundum Matheum* warns that many will come who will pretend to be God, as if they were Christ himself. *De Temporibus Anticristi* continues this thought, saying that the visible devil will claim that he is God, and will deceive with illusions, persecuting or martyring those who do not succumb. The sermon *Secundum Lucan* tells that the Antichrist will rage and terrify the world. The two *De Anticristo* homilies quote Matthew 24.24, warning of the coming of false Christs, saying '[s]urgent... pseudocristi'. *Secundum Marcum* also discusses the last days, quoting Paul's pronouncement that some would blaspheme horribly against God's divinity, by despising the teachings of scripture and loving injustice. Wulfstan continues that whereas at the birth of Christ, great joy and help were at hand, with the birth of the Antichrist, great depravity and misery will be at hand.

Summary

Just as all that is about Christ is good, all that is about the Antichrist is evil. Despite the scant explicit attention that Wulfstan pays to Christ in his eschatological preaching, the descriptions of the wickedness of the Antichrist work to emphasise all that Wulfstan's audience must already know about Christ, and help them to focus on the desirability of following him and avoiding the negative outcomes of following Antichrist. Importantly, God does permit the Antichrist to test people, and so the Antichrist does not entirely work contrary to his will. Christ is the initial point of focus of the Antichrist, as he is set against him in time, both as the start point when Antichrist is bound, and the end target for those who survive the ravages of the last times.

Catechetical Homilies

Wulfstan's catechetical homilies are teaching documents, designed to enlighten and indoctrinate their congregation on the precepts and history of the Christian faith. They are by nature therefore the most doctrinal of Wulfstan's homilies, as their purpose is to impart received wisdom and established teachings. However, because of this, they are also largely derivative, and therefore less specifically applied to Wulfstan's setting. Lionarons explains their importance, saying 'salvation history is important to both Wulfstan and Ælfric because it provides through example guidelines for contemporary Christian behaviour; it offers a point of entry for the Anglo-Saxons into Christian world history'.¹⁰²³ These catechetical homilies rely directly on the writings of Ælfric, Alcuin and Pirmin, along with other more distant sources, biblical material, and church texts. Yet, through these sermons he is able to focus his preaching on what he sees is essential for his congregation to believe and do in order to be as close to Christ as possible. This does coincide with the general basis of Wulfstan's teaching: to follow God's rules and teachings in order to receive a positive outcome at the inevitable, if not imminent Judgement. These texts provide the foundation that enables this to happen, whereas other texts, such as the eschatological homilies, show why Wulfstan perceives there to be such a need.

There are seven homilies in this category, three of these in a number of different versions, as shown below. These homilies cross-refer to one another and build upon ideas shared between them. The fundamental teaching is to venerate Christ, and follow his commands. Wulfstan focuses on the core texts of the Christian tradition, namely the *Our Father* and both the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, as well as the biblical texts that discuss the gifts of the Spirit and Isaiah's warning to the sinful. He also deals with the primary sacrament of baptism, moral lessons about the Christian life, and provides an adaptation of Ælfric's sermon on false gods. The emphasis is primarily on moral behaviour, backed up with scriptural and patristic teaching. Appropriately, the most common exhortation that comes through is the Great Commandment of the New Testament: to love God and love your neighbour as yourself, or at least, to treat your neighbour as you would like to be treated. Another common New Testament image to come across in these homilies is the idea of Christ

¹⁰²³ Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 83.

being the head, and all Christians his limbs, further illustrating the importance of this concept to Wulfstan, who dwelt upon it in the context of the Antichrist and his followers. It suggests a co-dependency, with the actions of Christians particularly important, guided by Christ. Below, I examine these homilies in their groupings as arranged by Bethurum. Sometimes the texts in each group differ more widely than at other times, but they nonetheless have some consistent messages.

Xa, Xb and Xc. Her ongynð be Cristendome, etc.

The three versions of sermon X are based upon rules for a good Christian life, reiterating the premise that Christians must imitate Christ. Bethurum describes Wulfstan's doctrine in these homilies as 'the most completely developed of its kind in Old English, and among his own works the most basic in that it treated the things he seems to have been most concerned with'.¹⁰²⁴

Xa lists rules for churchmen, translated from Amalarius's *De Regula Canonicorum*,¹⁰²⁵ and along with the other two homilies emphasises the Great Commandment, the need to love God and neighbour, in the hope of going to Heaven. Xb and Xc are similar to one another, with the former in Latin and the latter in Old English. They both include the Ten Commandments and many other instructions, with admonitions to turn to right. The great laws are continuous and enduring, and help to illustrate the continuity of the bible, and Christ's importance before the incarnation: sermon Xc uniquely says that 'Ðas tyn beboda God sylf gedihte 7 awrat 7 Moyse befæste; 7 Crist on his godspelle eft hy geswutelode, 7 he georne eac lærde þæt manna gehwile oðrum beode þæt þæt he wille þæt man him beode',¹⁰²⁶ thus linking Christ's incarnation to a new revelation of God's ancient commandments. The Lord Christ is coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and as he helps and governs us, we must in return believe in and venerate the Trinity. This rare reference to the Trinity works to pull together Wulfstan's reading of the Old and New Testaments, and to show the consistency which might otherwise be overlooked.

These two homilies are further united by the way they describe the relationship between Christ and Christians, with one of Wulfstan's favourite images; 'Be Cristes agenum naman syn cristene genamode, forðam Crist is cristenra heafod, 7 ealle cristene men syndon

¹⁰²⁴ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 307.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201, 'These ten commands God himself wrote and inscribed and delivered to Moses; and Christ in his gospel also explained them, and he eagerly also taught that each of men should show to others that which he wishes that one would show to him'.

to Cristes limum getealde, gyf hy heora cristendom gehealdað mid rihte'.¹⁰²⁷ This involves following Christ's teaching and laws, as he instructed in the gospel, turning from bad to good, and venerating the church. If people do not act as Christ would, they are not true Christians.

Both homilies call for us to love the church, the spiritual mother, which Xb affirms is wedded to Christ, in a very standard image taken from Ephesians 5 and the Song of Songs. Wulfstan attributes to the church a good deal of authority: homily Xb says that Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man, gave power to the church to bind and loose (as he gave it to his disciples at Matthew 16.19), as seen in the archiepiscopal sermons. The dominant theme throughout these homilies is that in order to be a true part of Christ's body, and his church, one must follow God's teaching, which is made explicit according to Wulfstan's interpretation.

XI. Incipit de visione Isaie Prophete quam vidit super Iudam et Hierusalem.

Some homilies have almost nothing to say about Christ: sermon XI is one of these. It is based on a prophecy of Isaiah, with a range of warnings, speaking about the sins of the Israelites and God's punishments. As Hall points out, it is not at all a sermon, though it was included in Napier and Bethurum's collections because of its use of rhythmical prose.¹⁰²⁸ It might as fittingly be placed in the fourth section below, on 'evil days'. Christ is not present, but the end of times and his Judgement are alluded to. The vision of Jeremiah is attached at the end, calling again for repentance. Wulfstan hopes this homily will lead his people to a change of heart.

XII. De falsis deis.

This homily is a rewriting of Ælfric's homily on the same subject. Both texts seem to be largely academic in their interests,¹⁰²⁹ though no doubt Wulfstan hoped, as always, to influence his congregation. Heathenism was a concern for Wulfstan, and though Meaney is able to describe the many types of heathenism to which Wulfstan might be referring, she concludes that one cannot be sure how effective Wulfstan's crusade was.¹⁰³⁰ Sermon XII, on false gods, discusses just what its rubric claims; of Christ, it only states as its conclusion and

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200, 'Christians are named by Christ's own name, because Christ is the head of Christians, and all Christian men are accounted as Christ's limbs, if they hold their Christianity correctly.' cf. 1 Corinthians 12.12 'For as the body is one and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body: So also is Christ', and Colossians 1.18 'And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may hold the primacy'.

¹⁰²⁸ Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', p. 96.

¹⁰²⁹ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 334.

¹⁰³⁰ Meaney, 'And We Forbeodað', p. 500.

affirmation of true faith that there is one almighty God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that this is the one divine might and eternal God, ruling all created works. The sermon starts with the premise of heathens sinning greatly in the past and being far from God. Deceived by the devil, they created gods and spurned their Creator God. Wulfstan emphasises the folly of this, as creation can do nothing but what God permits. He goes on to discuss the Norse gods and their Roman equivalents. As in the eschatological homilies, the true God is defined in opposition to the false ones; whilst the classical gods and their Germanic counterparts indulge in incest, war, infanticide and worse, the Christian audience must be led to think about how completely different is their own God. Wulfstan was preaching to the converted on the whole, not attempting to present a new religion in opposition to the old, and his catechetical writing reflects this throughout. It is more often a reminder of what he presumes his congregation already knows, or a further explanation of something they are already familiar with but may not entirely understand.

VI. Incipiunt sermones Lupi Episcopi.

This homily is also based on one of Ælfric's, *De Initio Creaturae*, as well as the so-called *Dicta abbatis Pirmini*.¹⁰³¹ Sermon VI emphasises the need to reverence and believe in God, putting pressure on the responsibility of ecclesiastics to teach others about God, or else be accountable for their sins at Doomsday. It is the only place where heathen practices are detailed.¹⁰³² God is called eternal, the Creator and Ordainer. Wulfstan gives an overview of salvation history, from the Creation of Heaven and the fall of Lucifer, to the Creation and fall of humankind, through to Christ's redemption of humanity. As in the eschatological homilies, God gives the devil permission to test people, and he leads many astray. Christ is described as 'ealra bearna betst þe æfre geboren wurde', who 'eallum manncynne com to ðearfe'.¹⁰³³ He was humble, and totally human, in his mortality. Wulfstan alleges that he was born four thousand, one hundred and sixty-three years after his ancestor Adam, who is linked with Christ via Abraham, the prophets, David, and eventually Mary. Wulfstan tries to explain the relatively recent birth of the Creator of all creation, in what is probably his most extensive statement on Christ's nature:

Nu is mænig ungelæred man þe wile þencan hu þæt beon mæg þæt se ðe gescop on fruman ealle gesceafta, þæt he wearð þus late geboren, swa ic eow nu areht hæbbe. Ac

¹⁰³¹ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 293.

¹⁰³² Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, p. 342.

¹⁰³³ Bethurum, *Homilies*, VI, p. 150, 'the best of all children that ever were born'; 'came for the need of all mankind'.

ic wylle eow gyt cuðlicor secgan, þæt ge hit magon þe swutelicor ongytan. He wæs æfre soð Godd 7 is 7 aa bið, 7 he gescop þurh his godcundan mihte ealle gesceafta lange ær he sylfe geboren mann wurde, forðam he næs na ær mann ær he for ealles middaneardes alysednesse sylfwilles menniscnesse underfeng þurh þæt clæne mæden, Sancta Marian. [...] Ær he wæs soð Godd on godcundness 7 næs na mann, ac nu he is ægðer ge soð Godd ge soð mann.¹⁰³⁴

Christ, therefore, always existed in his divinity, but did not become human until long after he had created the world. Christ's divinity was hidden in his humanity, and he did everything human except sin. He ate and drank, and felt hot and cold. God was mild to mankind when he sent his son, who redeemed mankind from the power of the devil with his own life. He taught people as they needed, and suffered for mankind, but then rose from the dead and through his death redeemed us from eternal death. He prepared the way to eternal life with the resurrection, and prepared the way to Heaven for us through his ascension. He will come again in the impending Judgement, and will want to know how we have repaid him for his suffering. The time of the Antichrist is yet to come, in which there will be great dread. Wulfstan does not explicitly link this here to God allowing humanity to be tested. He says that at the Judgement people shall be rewarded as they deserved in life. Mostly, Wulfstan is just stating received doctrine with little application, and it is only at the mention of Judgement that he starts to prod his audience towards action. While this homily looks at the person of God from Creation to Judgement, it focuses strongly on Christ's time on earth and his redeeming act through his birth, death and resurrection. This is, after all, at the heart of the Christian faith, but it is seldom that Wulfstan spends so much time explicitly examining it.

VII and VIIa. De Fide Catholica.

Sermons VII and VIIa discuss the importance of right belief and perception in Christianity. They may have been influenced by some of Ælfric's homilies, but do not depend upon them, and focus more on moral teaching than theology.¹⁰³⁵ They both emphasise the importance of

¹⁰³⁴ Bethurum, *Homilies*, VI, pp. 151-2, 'Now it is that many an unlearned man may wish to think how that may be, that he, who created all creation on earth, was thus born late, as I have now explained to you. But I will say to you yet more clearly, that you may understand it yet more clearly. He was always true God and is and always will be, and he created through his divine might all of creation long before he himself was born a man. Because he was never earlier a man before he, for the redemption of all earth, voluntarily received humanity through that pure maiden, Saint Mary. [...] 'Previously he was true God in divinity and was not at all man, but now he is both true God and true man'.

¹⁰³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

knowing the Our Father and the Creed, in English if not in Latin, and provide translations. Sermon VIIa translates the shorter Apostle's Creed and the *Pater Noster*, whereas sermon VII translates a hybrid creed, including aspects of the Apostle's Creed such as the harrowing of Hell, while also explaining the Trinity and Christ's two natures, as in the Nicene Creed. These two homilies thus include all the central tenets to the Christian faith, describing the roles of God from Creator to Ruler to Saviour, but speaking in the most detail about Christ becoming human for the need and redemption of all mankind.

Christ is described as mild-hearted, wondrous in that as ruler of Heaven and earth he would allow himself to die. Christ is an example, a teacher, prayerful, God's son, true God in divinity and true man through his mother. He is a healer, raised the dead, and by his own will suffered betrayal and death. He was bound, struck and hung, pierced, buried, he broke through the gates of Hell and subdued the devil, before leading out those dear to him, showing he had power over life and death. He rose from the dead, saved us from eternal death, and stayed with his disciples for forty days, commanding them to go throughout the earth and teach right belief, before he ascended into Heaven and prepared the way to eternal life. We are all redeemed by his blood. Wulfstan emphasises the need to repay Christ for all he had done, and believes that it is possible to tell from the signs that Christ predicted that the second coming is approaching. He says that everyone will be accountable for their deeds on Judgement Day, and that Christ will thank the loyal and send them to Heaven. Besides the Creed, the homilies say that we must know the Our Father, and so follow the example of Christ who taught his disciples to pray in this way. Wulfstan takes on Christ's role as teacher himself by translating and imparting his message, and thus becoming a conduit to God. Rather than necessarily hoping his congregation will become equal to Christ, Wulfstan is trying to encourage them to respond to these statements of faith by acting out their belief, and following Christ's teachings, so as to come as close to the ideal as possible.

VIIIa, VIIIb and VIIIc. Sermo de Baptismate, etc.

Sermons VIIIa, VIIIb and VIIIc show three versions of Wulfstan's sermon on baptism, with the first in Latin and the others in Old English. While nearly all of Wulfstan's service books have been lost, his Commonplace Book shows an awareness of Carolingian baptism commentaries.¹⁰³⁶ Sources include the *Epistola de baptismo* by Jesse of Amiens, Theodulf of Orléans's *De ordine baptismi*, Amalarius of Metz's *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, and Alcuin's

¹⁰³⁶ Jones, 'Wulfstan's Liturgical Interests', pp. 325 and 329.

epistolary outline of the rite of baptism.¹⁰³⁷ Hall believes the audience for VIIIA, the Latin text, was more select than the others,¹⁰³⁸ while Jones believes that Wulfstan received this homily ready-made.¹⁰³⁹ The homilies are largely instructive about the method and significance of the sacrament, rather than its scriptural origins. Wulfstan explains both the symbolism of the acts of the sacrament, and the internal changes it brings about. The three sermons cover a lot of the same ideas: they all discuss the newly baptised tasting salt: ‘7 ealswa se lichama þonne gefelð þæs sealdes scearpnesse, swa sceal seo sawul ongytan wisdomes snotornesse’,¹⁰⁴⁰ specified only in VIIIA ‘neque a sapore Cristi desidet’.¹⁰⁴¹ All three emphasise that when the priest makes the sign of the cross, the devil flees and Christ prepares to enter. This is the ritual of christening, before baptism, and involves the priest breathing the Trinity on the child. VIIIB and VIIC both explain the concept of Christians being the limbs and Christ the head, linking it to the suitability of receiving Christ’s body and blood in communion, and thus to Christ’s redemptive act. Sermon VIIB describes the unity of Christ’s body particularly effectively:

‘[m]id gelicum wurðe Crist bohte þone kasere 7 þone rican kyning 7 þone earming; þæt wæs mid his agenum blode. Be þam we magon ongitan 7 oncnawan þæt we synd ealle gebroðra 7 eac geswustra þonne we ealle to anum heofenlicum fæder swa oft clypiað swa we ure pater noster singað’.¹⁰⁴²

In order to be baptised, the candidate must choose Christ, love and obey Him. If the child is too young, godparents should do this on behalf of their godchildren. Sermon VIIC argues that if somebody baptised holds on to their Christianity, Christ will recognise them as his son. These sermons show that everybody is equal in God’s eyes, but he does require them to give a response. While the sacramental symbols of salt and the sign of the cross bear a mystical quality with the ability to draw Christ into the newly baptised, and expel the devil, this is not a magical quick-fix but requires on-going faithfulness to God.

¹⁰³⁷ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 302.

¹⁰³⁸ Hall, ‘Wulfstan’s Latin Sermons’, p. 96.

¹⁰³⁹ Jones, ‘Wulfstan’s Liturgical Interests’, p. 329.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Bethurum, *Homilies*, VIIC, p. 178, ‘and just as the body then feels the sharpness of the salt, thus shall the soul perceive the prudence of wisdom’.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VIIIA, p. 169, ‘lest he should fall from the flavour of Christ’.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*, VIIB, pp. 173-4, ‘With equal value Christ bought the emperor and the powerful king and the wretch; that was with his own blood. By that we may perceive and understand that we are all brothers and also sisters when we all call to one Heavenly Father as often as we sing our *Our Father*’.

IX. De Septiformi Spiritu.

Sermon IX is a fairly straightforward rewriting of Ælfric's homily on the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁰⁴³ The homily is catechetical, explaining the gifts of the Spirit and their negative parallels, the *ungifa* of the devil, but it does not dwell on the person of Christ at all. It is very specifically the third part of the Trinity that is under consideration, which is unique among all the homilies I have examined, except for those of Ælfric. All it says of Christ is that he taught truthfulness and steadfastness, whereas the Antichrist is the opposite in his treachery, teaching everybody to follow their own desires. Thus, this homily balances God with the devil, and Christ with the Antichrist, but despite inversions of its gifts there is no negative equivalent for the Holy Spirit. The power of the Trinity is even greater despite so much attention being paid to the evil force. Like the other homilies in this section, the need to follow God's teaching is at the forefront of Wulfstan's mind.

Summary

Wulfstan's catechetical homilies show that all his writing is based on the knowledge of sound Christian doctrine. He understands, and is able to explain, Christ's significance, and the course of salvation history from Creation, through Redemption, and eventually to Judgement. While this knowledge requires a reaction from the audience, in this set of homilies Wulfstan is more focused on imparting knowledge than he is on exacting any specific acts or attitudes. Wulfstan's Christ plays a more developed role in Wulfstan's preaching than scholars have commonly suggested he did, and while his position as Judge does come through most strongly in some homilies, this is extracted from, rather than being the only aspect of, Wulfstan's Christological beliefs and teaching.

Archiepiscopal Functions

This selection of Wulfstan's homilies is the most specifically directed to a particular group, namely, the clergy. Barrow points out that despite the theme of Wulfstan's preaching, we have no definite information about Wulfstan's individual relationship with the clergy.¹⁰⁴⁴ It is interesting that they should be delivered in the format of sermons rather than letters: after all, why should everybody else need to know the duties of archbishops and other religious?

¹⁰⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Barrow, 'Wulfstan and Worcester', p. 141.

However, most of them can be applied to a wider audience, and if nothing else it would be empowering for the laity to know how the clergy ought to act. The homilies on archiepiscopal functions are not intended so much to warn as to instruct. Although part of this instruction does include a warning of dire outcomes for faulty or insufficient pastoring to God's flock, Christ is less a threatening Judge than an example and a teacher.

XVIa and XVIb. Verba Ezechiel Prophete.

All but one of these sermons comes in a unique form: sermon XVI, on the words of the prophet Ezekiel, has both a Latin and an Old English version, suiting both the more and less learned. Sections of the homily also occur in *Institutes of Polity* and Cnut's laws.¹⁰⁴⁵ This sermon in particular focuses on the target group for the archiepiscopal homilies in general, on Wulfstan's 'favourite subject',¹⁰⁴⁶ as the Ezekiel text speaks of the pastoral duties of spiritual shepherding which Wulfstan applies to priests and bishops. However, this text is from the Old Testament, and only in the Latin version does Wulfstan speak of 'gregem Christi'.¹⁰⁴⁷ Yet, surely we must assume that Wulfstan intended an image of pastoral care to lead straight on to a comparison with the Good Shepherd, which is the basis for Christ's instructions to Peter, the first bishop, to feed his sheep.¹⁰⁴⁸ This parallel draws the role of the bishop very close to Christ, thus setting a very high standard. The message of these homilies can easily be compared with the *Institutes of Polity*, as described in the Introduction, and is a particularly clear example of the consistent nature of Wulfstan's interests, and how closely he aligned the roles of God, and Christ, to those of the leaders of the church.

XV. Sermo de Cena Domini.

Sermon XV refers explicitly to its audience of bishops, acting in place of Christ, in the framework of Easter. The source of the homily is a Latin text by Abbo of Saint-Germain.¹⁰⁴⁹ As this sermon is designated for the mass of the Lord's Supper, it seems that Wulfstan does not share Ælfric's qualms about not preaching during the Easter *Triduum*. Wulfstan does not mention the more common themes of Holy Thursday, such as the establishment of the Eucharist or Christ washing the feet of his apostles. Indeed, the Eucharist, though so significant in Ælfric's writing, has no role in Wulfstan's, but is put aside in favour of the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation. Rather, he discusses the seemingly uncommon

¹⁰⁴⁵ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 349.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 239, 'Christ's flock'.

¹⁰⁴⁸ John 21.15-17.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 345.

practice of casting sinners out from the church on Ash Wednesday, and giving them the chance to be sorrowful and atone for their bad deeds, so that they might be readmitted at the Mass of the Lord's Supper, on Holy Thursday. The sermon refers to the precedent of God creating Adam pure and sinless, but casting him out of Paradise because of his sin: Christ, through his 'mildheortnyse',¹⁰⁵⁰ later brought him from his misery and led him into Heaven. Wulfstan directs that bishops should teach by Christ's example, casting people out for major sins, until they atone for them, by seeking the church and calling to Christ with a grieving spirit. He exhorts people to earn the mild Christ's mercy and to praise him. In this homily, the role of bishops is placed in direct parallel to that of Christ, with the ability both to cast out and to forgive sins. Wulfstan highlights Christ's promise to his apostles, that he would make them capable of binding and loosing, and applies this to his contemporary environment. Christ himself is shown as merciful but not without expectations, and not accepting or condoning sin.

XVII. Lectio Secundam Lucam.

Sermon XVII goes further with some of these ideas, illustrating Christ at his Ascension blessing his apostles as bishops, and sending them out to evangelise. Unusually for Wulfstan's writing, it starts with a pericope, and is genuinely homiletic. Wulfstan says that despite the precedent of Moses appointing Aaron as 'bishop' at God's command, here Christ established the episcopacy in a new way, as indeed he did so many things (for example, establishing the new commandments), with Peter appointed as the first bishop. The order of things is important, with the bishops established by Christ and therefore acting on his behalf as they strive to uphold God's laws. They literally represent Christ: 'Se ðe eow hyreð, he cwæð, me he hyreð, 7 se ðe forsyhð eow, witod he forsyhð me'.¹⁰⁵¹ Wulfstan emphasises the importance of preachers and teachers being engaged in frequent prayer to Christ, and listening, on behalf of all Christians. In this case, how the people react to the bishop is representative of how they would react to Christ, and vice versa. Wulfstan advises that if a bishop should do wrong but speak right, the people should, in accordance with Christ's teaching, follow his words, not his actions. As bishops represent Christ they are to be respected and obeyed, but as they deviate from the ideal their deviations should not be adhered to, obliging the people to be aware themselves of what Christ does in fact teach.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236, 'mildheartedness', a term frequently favoured by Wulfstan in reference to Christ, as in homilies III, VII, Xc, XIII, XIV, XV and XVIII.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244, 'he who listens to you, he said, he listens to me, and he who rejects you, in truth he rejects me'.

XVIII. De dedicatione ecclesiae.

The final sermon in this section, XVIII, is on the dedication of a church, and is based on Ælfric's *In dedicatione ecclesiae*.¹⁰⁵² It describes Solomon establishing his temple, and about halfway through the text draws close parallels between Solomon and Christ: 'Leofan men, se eorðlica cyning Salomon getacnað þæne heofenlican cyning, þæt is, Crist sylfne; 7 þæt an hus þe he arærde Gode to lofe of eorðlican antimbre, þæt getacnað þa halgan *ecclesiam* þe Crist getimbrode of gastlicum andweorce'.¹⁰⁵³ The Hebrew meaning of Solomon is 'peaceful',¹⁰⁵⁴ one of the major attributes commonly (though not by Wulfstan) linked with Christ, the 'Prince of Peace'.¹⁰⁵⁵ Also like Christ, Solomon was given wisdom by God, and he asked God to have mercy on everyone. Solomon's offering betokened the daily offering in the church, as Christ had established and exemplified. In a theme familiar from the eschatological homilies, we are described as the limbs of the church, and Christ the head. All Christians will be gathered to their head at Judgement, and the good shall dwell in eternal joy with him in the Heavenly Church. Wulfstan frowns upon bad behaviour in a church, saying that one ought not to be idle, but should pray and listen: God's angels will report to him if it is not so. He also draws an analogy, probably based on Paul's teaching about the body being a temple at 1 Corinthians 6.19, between a physical church and the heart; it is good to prepare them both for God, with the Holy Spirit in and the devil out. This sermon is more gently instructive than most in its emphasis on prayer, and the initial story-telling suggests that this story of Old Testament extravagance was a well-liked text and a helpful way of drawing parallels between Christ and temporal kings, with a nod back to the glory days of great royal building projects, not a priority for Wulfstan's kings.

XIV. Sermo in XL.

Sermon XIV, written for Lent, emphasises the need to do good in this penitential period, to fulfil the promises made to God, and to make up for wrong things done. Penitential acts include prayer and alms-giving. Christ's forbidding drunkenness is mentioned, particularly that drinking undoes the good of fasting. The sermon emphasises the need not to despair, as 'Se is swyðe milde þe mancyn geworhte 7 æfter ðam eft gebohte deorweorðum ceape, 7 he wile miltsian 7 mycle forgyfnesse don forsyngedan mannum, wið þam þe hi geswican 7

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-8, 'Beloved men, the earthly king Solomon betokens the Heavenly King, that is, Christ himself; and that one house that he raised in praise of God from earthly material, that betokens the holy church that Christ built of spiritual material.'

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Isaiah 9.6, 'Princeps pacis'. See also Vercelli homilies V and VI.

geornlice betan geomerendum mode'.¹⁰⁵⁶ Thus Christ the Redeemer is linked to the Creator God, emphasising his generosity and kindness more than anything else. Throughout, emphasis is placed on Christ's teaching and the need to adhere to it, but also on the achievability of forgiveness following repentance and a changing of ways.

XIII. Sermo ad Populum.

Sermon XIII is directed *ad Populum*, and it is relevant for all Christians, not just the clergy. It uses material from several of Wulfstan's homilies and law-codes, as well as Defensor's *Liber Scintillarum*.¹⁰⁵⁷ It highlights the need to believe in God, described as Almighty, Ruler and Creator. Wulfstan gives reasons to believe in God and be faithful to him, and describes Christ's actions for the redemption of mankind. Wulfstan emphasises that Christ came into this life and died for us, suffering greatly through his mild-heartedness for our need; he was bound, scourged, and killed; he rose from death, and thus showed he had control of life and death. His death means that we are saved from eternal death, as he bought us from Hell with precious blood. Thus Wulfstan implores his audience to follow Christ, asking 'Leofan men, hwa mæg æfre oðrum furðor freondscype gecyðan þonne he his agen feorh gesylle 7 ðurh þæt his freond wið deað ahredde'?¹⁰⁵⁸ Christ's friendship and generosity are again the major factors used to inspire adherence to his ways. We need to earn the gift of the kingdom of Heaven by obeying God's commands, shunning the devil, adhering to baptismal vows, and confessing and atoning for errors, as well as thanking God and remembering that we are all brothers. While the focus of the homily remains on the audience Wulfstan is determined to influence, the incarnate Christ is the central referent to inspire good behaviour and takes a far more dominant role than in most of Wulfstan's homilies.

Summary

Christ's role varies throughout these half dozen homilies, and only once is he a central figure. However, his role is more explicit than in many of Wulfstan's homilies, with particular reference to him through typology and short pericopes. Lengthy parallels are drawn in these homilies through typological associations between the Old Testament and current practice, conducted through Christ. His own merciful and generous acts are recounted. He is primarily a model for bishops, whom he appoints to their roles, and for all people. Positive elements of

¹⁰⁵⁶ Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 234, 'He is very mild who made mankind and after that also bought it for a costly price, and he will have mercy and great forgiveness for the sins of men, in exchange for the fact that they cease and eagerly better with a grieving spirit'.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226, 'Beloved men, who may ever make more manifest his friendship to others than that he give up his own life and through that save his friend from death?'.

Christ's teaching and exemplary acts are the foundation upon which his bishops should build their leadership. Christ is not depicted as somebody who ought to be feared, but, as always, Wulfstan does require his congregation actively to follow Christ, venerating and praying to him, and, by repenting, following his will.

Evil Days

Evil days is the subject for which Wulfstan is generally remembered. These are the latest of Wulfstan's homilies to have been composed, and his sermons on 'Evil Days' seem to contain elements of a good deal of the corpus of Wulfstan's homiletic literature. Bethurum put only three homilies into this category in her edition: XIX *Be Godcundre Warnunge* (About Divine Warning); XX *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (in three versions); and XXI On Evil Rulers, rubricated *Her is gyt rihtlic warnung 7 soðlic mynung ðeode to ðearfe* ('Here is still, for the need of the people, right warning and true encouragement'). These three homilies are in a similar vein to Wulfstan's eschatological preaching, but more about general evil rather than the end of the world.

XX. Sermo Lupi

Sermo Lupi is by far the best known of Wulfstan's works today, and it seems to have also been popular among Wulfstan's audience and on into the twelfth century.¹⁰⁵⁹ *Sermo Lupi* is famous for its explicit contextualisation, focusing on the circumstances surrounding its writing: it outlines the bad behaviour of the English with specific details, the consequences of this, current and hypothetical, and provides an admonition to turn from sin. Jurovics argues that the *Sermo Lupi* is the most characteristic of Wulfstan's work, as it reflects what he judges to be the dominant purpose of Wulfstan's career, the 'moral regeneration of the English nation'.¹⁰⁶⁰ While the topical references within the homily are unusual, he does not think this makes the sermon inconsistent with Wulfstan's canon.¹⁰⁶¹ It is unusual among Wulfstan's sermons in that it speaks of shame.¹⁰⁶² Wilcox affirms that the *Sermo Lupi* embodies Wulfstan's instructions to other bishops, to call out to their congregation rather

¹⁰⁵⁹ Wilcox, 'Sermo Lupi as Political Performance', p. 396.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Jurovics, 'Moral Purpose', p. 203.

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁰⁶² Cowen, 'Byrastas and Bysmeras', p. 405.

than ‘mumble’.¹⁰⁶³ He believes that its first performance would have been at York in February 1014, which may have been a meeting of the *witan* about banishing Æthelred.¹⁰⁶⁴ As Archbishop of York, Wulfstan would have hosted such a gathering, and his role would have included outlining the issues and providing moral leadership.¹⁰⁶⁵ Lees has said of the *Sermo Lupi* that it ‘uses the politics of the present to emphasize, explicitly, the necessity for divine rule’,¹⁰⁶⁶ thus showing more about the importance of God than is superficially evident, and delivering a universal message. It is the only one of the homilies in this section to mention Christ at all, but what it does with this mention is minimal.

Firstly, as in the style of charters and other documents, Christ is used in the dating rubric, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos quando Dani maxime persecuti sunt eos, quod fuit anno millesimo XIII ab incarnatione Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*.¹⁰⁶⁷ This is worthy of note as none of the other homilies are rubricated with a date, and it seems particularly pertinent here as this homily discusses the earthly lord, King Edward, who was spurned and killed by his people, just as was the incarnate Christ: ‘Eadward man forrædde 7 syððan acwealde 7 æfter þam forbærnde’.¹⁰⁶⁸ It also sets Christ within time, and in doing so makes him historic and tangible: for us as later readers, it similarly sets Wulfstan and his congregants at a fixed point, albeit dependent on the version of the text. One additional detail worth noting briefly is that of the five versions of this homily, it is only in the eleventh-century manuscript C, CCC 201, that Wulfstan implores ‘Uton creopan to Criste 7 bifigendre heortan clipian gelome 7 geearnian his mildse’.¹⁰⁶⁹ Besides this, Christ is not specifically mentioned, but is the implied basis for good behaviour through his teaching, as is illustrated in the catechetical homilies.

God is a constant figure in the homily, mostly mentioned in reference to his law and his anger. While it is Christ who is usually depicted as Judge at Doomsday, this is not made at all clear here. Wulfstan says we must, by following the laws, merit the remedy from God. This is presumably salvation or redemption, which as we and his audience would know, comes through the sacrifice of Jesus. He does not, surprisingly, make this more explicit.

¹⁰⁶³ Wilcox, ‘Wolf on Shepherds’, p. 412.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Wilcox, ‘*Sermo Lupi* as Political Performance’, pp. 376 and 380.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Wilcox, ‘*Sermo Lupi* as Political Performance’, p. 381.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Bethurum, *Homilies* XX, p. 267, ‘The sermon of the Wolf to the English when the Danes persecuted them the most, which happened in the year 1014 from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The earlier version, on p. 261, attests the date 1009. Translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 270, ‘One plotted against Edward and then killed [him] and after that burned [him] up’. *Larspell* also mentions Æthelred being driven from his land (p. 258), though this is omitted in later versions of the homily.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-6, ‘Let us creep to Christ and with trembling hearts, call out frequently and earn his mercy’.

Christ's redeeming act of purchasing us from the devil is shown in reversal when Wulfstan talks about the Anglo-Saxons being sold into slavery, and particularly with the purchase of women and the gang-rape he describes. This inversion of the divine act of love and forgiveness heightens its baseness and abhorrence. It is reflected in Wulfstan's later legislation on widows, where he objects to selling into slavery those whom Christ bought with his blood.¹⁰⁷⁰ In Wulfstan's catechetical homilies he calls his audience as Christians to emulate Christ, but this, if anything, shows them doing the opposite and emulating the Antichrist, becoming his limbs, as in the eschatological homilies. The coming of the Antichrist is mentioned in passing at the beginning of the homily, in the context of the worsening of the world, but he is not examined in detail here. As the Antichrist opposes Christ, the Vikings are the *alter ego* of the English, with the suggestion being, especially with the reference to Gildas speaking of the wane of the British, that they might succeed the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁰⁷¹ While this homily does not explicitly discuss Christ, as do others in this collection, many of the themes that come up in the others are brought together here and alluded to in a fairly comprehensive manner.

XIX and XXI

Though not mentioning Christ at all, the two other homilies in this section are on comparable themes, both warning the people of bad times to come, and emphasising the need to follow God's commands. Sermon XIX paraphrases and explains passages from Leviticus 26, in which God warns Moses to be loyal in order to be rewarded, emphasising the punishments that will happen if his precepts are not followed. Though Wulfstan does not apply this to his own setting, he does say that it should be taken as a warning. This homily portrays God, as in *Sermo Lupi*, as a deity who must be pleased, repaying good with good, evil with evil, and being just but judging. Sermon XXI nominally gives 'rihtlic warnung 7 soðlic myngung',¹⁰⁷² to the people, admonishing them to turn from wrong to right, and emphasising the need to get in order for God. It describes the shame of misdeeds, and advocates a quick return to the Lord with repentance. Wulfstan preaches that one must love what God loves and shun what angers him, and be faithful to him and his law. As in the other homilies in this section, the emphasis is on a God who judges, and whom it is essential to please, by following his laws and emulating him.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Hollis, 'Wulfstan's Legislation', p. 458.

¹⁰⁷¹ Cowen, 'Byrastas and Bysmeras', pp. 410-1.

¹⁰⁷² Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 276, 'right[ly] warning and tru[ly] encouragement'.

Summary

None of these three homilies are about Christ, but he does provide a basis for their teachings and some context. God in Judgement is ever present and dominant in Wulfstan's thoughts, and the second coming of Christ is the backdrop for his warnings.

Conclusion

The homilies of Wulfstan are based upon the teachings of Christ, and the church's application of them. Christ is fundamental to all of these homilies, but while he is the model for all that is good, it is Christianity, rather than Christ, that provides the best guidance for the Anglo-Saxon audience of these homilies. Wulfstan is more concerned about persuading his audiences to follow his teaching than he is with indoctrinating them with detailed beliefs. As Stanley says, Wulfstan exalted the glory of God throughout the land, and loved his laws.¹⁰⁷³ His relatively limited interest in imparting theology is perhaps best shown when he teaches the creed and *Pater Noster* as the most fundamental texts for a Christian to know: these are all that he shares with the laity, in all likelihood leaving more detailed texts, such as those on baptism, rather for the clergy. Not only is Christ not often present in the homilies, but when the deity is spoken of it is usually *God*, rather than a specific member of the Trinity. Whilst it can be assumed that God in Judgement is the Son this is by no means clear, and contrasts strongly with the anonymous homilies where the Crucifixion is a major reference point in Judgement. Christ is perhaps most clearly depicted as a point of contrast to the Antichrist, whose hypothetical and futuristic description counters the established conception of Christ. Despite, or perhaps because of, Wulfstan's close association with kings, and his own role as a law-maker, these characteristics of Christ are not developed. The vulnerability of the Anglo-Saxon kings in *Sermo Lupi* might be paralleled with Christ's mistreatment by the Jews, but this point is not laboured, wisely given Cnut's accession. Wulfstan's lack of a distinct and clearly-identifiable Christ figure helps to keep his sermons both politically neutral and relevant in the turbulent environment of tenth-century England.

¹⁰⁷³ Stanley, 'Wulfstan and Ælfric', p. 441.

CHAPTER SIX

ORDFRUMA AND ENDE: CONCLUSION

As can be concluded from the preceding chapters, the homilies of the Anglo-Saxon church do not exhibit a single, unified Christology. While there may be limited innovation in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, the way they are put together is often unique. They are a diverse body of texts, with wide-ranging interests and varied perspectives. All of the homilists, to some extent, pick and choose from their sources, and given that they are already often choosing which occasions and texts they wish to focus upon this gives each collection what can only be considered an original perspective. However, that is not to say that their underlying beliefs are so different as to make them irreconcilable with one another.

The way in which they depict Christ reflects this diversity, while also showing an underlying unity. The differences between the anonymous texts and those of Wulfstan and Ælfric are certainly notable, yet they have far more in common than not: the ultimate intention of all of them is to bring the audience closer to Christ in order to be with him forever, though they have different means to this end, focusing variously on penance, correct teaching and meriting redemption. All of the collections focus to some degree on the major feasts of the church, and thus spend some time on the exposition of the most important scriptures, particularly Christmas, the Epiphany, Palm Sunday, the Passion, Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost. The homilies often show different emphases despite being based on the same text: for example, the Vercelli Christmas homily shows a good deal of interest in typology and comparing Christ to Augustus, whereas the Blickling homily focuses on Mary and Christ's temporary dwelling on earth. Wulfstan does not discuss the incarnation at all, but Ælfric composed three homilies on the subject, one focusing on Christ as *Logos* as in John's gospel, one using the events of Luke's gospel to reveal God's plan typologically, and the other focusing on the prophecies about Christ. The homilists all have different scopes, with Ælfric the most wide-ranging and thus covering the most occasions, sometimes more than once.

Depicting Christ is not the central interest of any of the homilists, except perhaps Ælfric. The compiler of the Vercelli Book appears to have had a purposeful outlook and his Christ is thus remarkably consistent, if largely single-faceted. The homilist seems most interested in drawing his readers (or auditors) to greater self-awareness, leading to penance and better behaviour in light of their imminent Judgement. Christ therefore is usually

depicted in a moralising or judging role, often enthroned, but only so as to influence the audience's behaviour. Christ is generally inactive, responding to the pleas and actions of others. His saints are used to reveal his practical influence.

The majority of the Blickling homilies are for penitential feasts, and there is therefore an emphasis on Christ's future role as Judge, rather than a personal relationship with Christ. While these are exhortative homilies, like Ælfric's they are also interested in revealing hidden meanings within the texts on which they are based. Christ is a fairly abstracted and inactive figure, more divine than human, and his involvement in the world is often represented by intermediaries, such as the saints. Nonetheless the image of Christ is on the whole a gently compassionate one, with the homilists' overall goal being to encourage listeners to emulate Christ and his saints in order to be with them in Heaven, something that is reflected by the feasts the compiler chooses to commemorate. There is, therefore, less of a threat of Christ in Judgement and more of an aspiration to be with him afterwards.

Wulfstan also is, of course, interested in eschatology, but his predominant wish is to improve the behaviour of his congregation. His relatively succinct corpus of homilies spends little time on the gospels, and emphasises far more the need to live a good Christian life, through education in prayer, the catechism and creed. The roles of God and Christ overlap in Wulfstan's writing more than they do in the other collections, and the legalistic and authoritative divinity can be associated with Christ, who also reflects Wulfstan's thoughts on secular kings. The focus on the Antichrist also discloses a good deal about Wulfstan's thoughts on the incarnate deity. What little is directly revealed about Christ shows him as the basis for the sacraments and important events within the church, as well as the basis for the teachings of the church.

Ælfric, in his systematic exposition of most of the important days and scriptures of the church year, on a two-year cycle, as well as numerous saints lives, is the most able to provide a varied and complex image of Christ. While he does indeed do so, he is nonetheless remarkably consistent, with few examples of contradiction – more than can be said of the anonymous homilies, despite the relative brevity of their collections – but at the same time he is a lot more confined by what he considers orthodox, and while able to make the most of the pretty expositions of his Roman forefathers, and sometimes develop on these himself, he shows relatively little home-grown Insular influence. What there is largely comes from Bede, whose main task was also the selection and transmission of patristic texts. Ælfric is the only

homilist to show extended interest in the scriptural Christ, as well as more complex iconography such as that taken from Bede. He constantly reiterates the primary understanding of Christ being God's Son, and of one being with the Father. He also focuses far more on Christ's role from Creation, through the Incarnation and Redemption, only concluding at Doomsday. Ælfric talks more of life everlasting than he does of the act of Judgement itself. His mission is to educate the people in order to draw them closer to Christ in order to have a happy outcome, but it is easy to tell from his writing and his love of typology that he really enjoys addressing the material as literary texts with much that can be drawn out for its own sake and with pleasure, rather than focusing excessively on the end of times, on which there is, after all, only limited scriptural material.

The Christology of the Anglo-Saxon church could be investigated more comprehensively than has been possible in the scope of this thesis. It would be beneficial to have a close examination of the Christology of other Anglo-Saxon texts, such as the poetry, history and charters, to see how and if they might differ from the more deliberate teaching of the church. A comparison with contemporary Continental homilies would also be worthwhile.

It is of course worth remembering that Anglo-Saxon literature does not end with the Norman Conquest, and that the Christology continuing to develop in the English church was influenced by the Old English homilies, still being copied in the twelfth century. It would be interesting to see how just how strong the Anglo-Saxon influences are, compared to others coming from the Continent.

The 'Theology' of the homilies greatly overlaps with the Christology, and it would be worthwhile to tease out the different strands in order to judge its complexity. Only Ælfric can be said to have a very explicit Christology, which remains deliberately separate from his depiction of God. Also, while Mary's role in Old English literature has already been looked at in some detail, it could, nonetheless, be worthwhile to compare her treatment with Christ's, one much more of a variable and human figure than the other, but both evidence of a good deal of devotion, trust and hope.

Plenty of interest has been shown in the eschatology of the Old English homilies, but I believe that this limits them and risks ignoring their much wider range of interests. A detailed study of Anglo-Saxon perceptions of salvation history could perhaps balance this, and show eschatology as only the final stage of a long continuum. The incarnation and redemption are

not precursors to Doomsday any more than is Creation, but highly significant milestones in themselves.

The depiction of Christ is a telling reflection of the interests and styles of each homilist or collator. His role is at times surprisingly low-key, largely because the homilists have their own agendas, and fit him in accordingly. The depiction of Christ is never inconsistent in a major way with the overall drive of the homilists, though it is only Ælfric who works primarily from scripture, rather than other extra-biblical traditions. The depictions of Christ range from his slightly bizarre relationship with Mary in the Blickling Assumption, through the Judge hearing Satan's and the saints' pleas in the Vercelli Book, to Wulfstan's force opposing the Antichrist and Ælfric's ever-living figure who partakes in a deliberate plan of redemption. Yet, though Ælfric may object to the style and texts of the earlier homilists, they are consistent in their respect for Christ and his teachings, and their desire to be with him in Heaven after his final Judgement.

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n.s. new series

o.s. original series

s.s. supplementary series

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